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Lesbian phantasy

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Measures of Distance
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Desiring daughters

RENEE BAERT

The opening image of the videotape, *The Influences of My Mother* (Sara Diamond, 1982), is a tight closeup on a dated, somewhat faded portrait of a young woman, perhaps in her mid twenties. The date of the black and white photograph is uncertain, but its representational style suggests a studio photograph from around the 1940s (fig. 1). The frame highlights a pair of intelligent eyes, set in a gentle, expressive face.

The camera opens out to a medium shot, revealing the head and shoulders portrait in its entirety. A female off-camera voice



Figure 1

addresses the viewer: 'It is usually the parent who constructs the identity of the child.' The camera continues opening to include in its frame a young woman seen standing at an adjoining wall, facing the portrait. There is an uncertain resemblance between this person and the figure in the portrait. The voice over continues: 'In my case, it was to be the child who would construct the identity of the parent.'

The character on camera and in the voice over is the videomaker Sara Diamond. The videotape is enactment and reenactment of the processes by which she has imagined and reconstructed the identity of the mother who died while she was a girl in early adolescence. The figure Diamond presents is the paradoxical one of a daughter constructing her sense of identity through imaginary identification with, and through irrevocable separation from, a maternal parent whose identity she is also constructing.

The combination in the work of autobiography and fantasy, memory and desire, history and interpretation, artefact and invention further position the document as one which blurs the boundaries of fact and fiction, personal and social. It is at once a desiring production and an enabling process, by means of which Diamond transforms her subjectivity. That this subjectivity is enabled by identificatory processes is made immediately evident. The opening scene continues with a shot of Diamond, her hair restyled, standing next to the photograph (fig. 2): two figures photographed at a similar age, dressed in similar tailored jacket and blouse, curly hair arranged in similar fashion, faces posed at a similar angle, the physical resemblance now certain.

The two figures, framed together in one image, look similar: but



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

they are not one. And it is the passage from the acknowledgement of sameness to the recognition of difference, from the process of imaginary identification to the distancing of symbolization, that is embodied within the narrative of the video and produced within its textual strategies.

At each stage of the video, which is organized in six chronological acts, the relationship of mother and daughter undergoes a new definition, but each new 'identity' of the mother is anchored in the daughter's interpretation of her: in this way, the daughter constructs the identity of the mother. In these representations by the daughter, the mother is transformed, as the tape proceeds, from a figure whose principal attribute to the remembering daughter is that of an overwhelming power to a separate being who is herself a willing, active subject – a desiring subject. And the recognition of her as both woman and mother enables the daughter's constitution of herself as both subject and daughter – a desiring subject, a desiring daughter.

In *Measures of Distance* (1988), by the Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum, the maternal figure is also an absence; but in this instance absence is due to the daughter's exile from the war-torn country in which her mother remains resident. In this work, it is not death or time that mark the daughter's distance from the mother, but a complex range of psychic and social eventualities within a lived relation. Like Diamond's tape, which was produced in 1982, *Measures of Distance*, made six years later, represents in a yet more rigorous and complex fashion a renegotiation of the mother–daughter tie; and it too underscores the importance of the maternal figure to the question of female subjectivity and desire. Hatoum, however, specifies the centrality of language to this negotiation and further insists on the multiplicity of determinants of subjectivity – of gender, race, class, age, nation, circumstance.

Unlike Diamond, who must construct the figure of the mother within an imaginary set of relations drawn from memories and memorabilia (figs 3–6), Hatoum constructs her videotape from materials provided by, and in collaboration with, the mother, and used with her consent. Yet this consent is a furtive one ('don't mention a thing about it to your father'), highlighting the mother–daughter bond as a trespass on patriarchal law.

Letters from mother to daughter, read in translation by Hatoum, form the principal narrative element of the soundtrack. It is the words of the mother that are spoken, but via the mediation and translation of the daughter, who is both reader (of the mother's letters) and writer (of the videotext). It is the daughter who, even as she is also the subject of an address originating with the other figure, assembles the evidences by which our view of the figure is constructed. And the figure she presents is likewise a desiring subject, a desiring mother. It, too, is a desiring production.

Freud does not posit desiring daughters. Indeed, the paradox of

female subjectivity and desire is its structural 'non-existence' within a symbolic order in which the phallus is the privileged signifier, not only as the representative of the principle of separation and individuation but as the symbol of desire, activity, potency. Not only is women's access to the phallic signifier highly problematic, but further a primary identification by the female subject with the mother is seen to mitigate against the separation and individuation that mark the distance from the maternal object, hence subjecthood and desire

Within these parameters, the possibility on the daughter's part of a positive identification with the mother is confined to an identification with maternity and its promise of *jouissance*. In wellknown accounts of this problematic, Julia Kristeva maintains that 'the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood'; Jessica Benjamin argues that the phallus maintains its monopoly on representing desire through the profound desexualization of the mother,² Luce Irigaray insists that the culturally unsymbolized mother–daughter relation leaves women in a state of dereliction.³ In short, women's identity is relegated to the positions made available in patriarchal ordering, that is, objecthood and motherhood

Thus theoretical attention to the mother–daughter relation is necessarily imbricated with theoretical work on female subjectivity in that, as Brenda Longfellow has argued, 'the political urgency of both projects bears on the possibility of articulating a different economy of desire and subjectivity as symbolic resistance to the law of the father and the interminability of phallic mediation'.⁴ Central to this engagement has been the attempt to extricate the female as subject of history from her designation as Woman and Other, and further to extricate the female as subject of desire from her capture as maternal object

The mother–daughter relation is a crucial site for women precisely because it is the ground for a disinvestment of the Oedipalized symbolic order. As Rosi Braidotti has argued, the mother–daughter paradigm 'is an imaginary couple that enacts the politics of female subjectivity, the relationship to the other woman and consequently the structures of female homosexuality as well as the possibility of a woman-identified redefinition of the subject'.⁵

Yet the very complexity and difficulty of the relation to the maternal object within the context of the daughter's claim to a 'place' and a desire within patriarchal culture bespeak the force of the psychic and cultural imperatives that the female subject must negotiate. A voluminous body of women's narratives – in this instance considered from within feminist video production – have given voice over the past two decades to the story of daughters uncomfortably bound to the psychic, symbolic and historical legacy of mothers.

1 Julia Kristeva 'Stabat mater' in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 16

2 Jessica Benjamin *The Bonds of Love* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988)

3 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), and other writings

4 Brenda Longfellow 'Love letters to the mother: the work of Chantal Akerman' *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* vol. 19 nos 1–2 (1989) p. 74

5 Rosi Braidotti, 'The politics of ontological difference' in Teresa Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) p. 96

6 Carol Zemel, 'Women and video',
artscanada, October 1973, p. 37.

Consider, for instance, the 1973 video-performance *Spring Sowing: Emergence*. In this real-time process tape by Jill Geiger, a supine woman is slowly cut out of her clothes as she, the clothes-cutter, and the camerawoman engage in casual conversation that counterpoints the dramatic scene being enacted. As Carol Zemel wrote of this work at the time: 'Slowly and deliberately, covering cloth was stripped away, so that when a naked and pensive woman rose from her cut-away shell, the psychic release was monumental. It was an assertive and liberating moment, at once poignant and ecstatic, as the now freed woman knelt, almost bowing, to her former being lying empty beside her'.⁶ This 'emergence' and rebirth of the fully grown woman, the motherless daughter, 'born' anew with the aid and ministrations of her peers, might be seen as a metaphor for the repression, within a celebratory 'sisterhood', of the vexed question of the psychic and familial relations of mothers and daughters.

In this first surge of the feminist movement in the 1970s, this conflictual relation was perhaps partially displaced onto the search for another mother – the apt, not deficient, mother. The embrace of Goddess mythology and ancient matriarchally-centred forms of spirituality; the reclamation of lost female figures of history; the rewriting and reinterpretation of myths, folktales, biblical stories, and so on; the denial of discord through the affirmative action of 'positive images' – all testify not only to the persistent historical erasure from the public sphere of women's voice and presence but also to the search, at the symbolic level of culture, for a 'positive' matrilineage: one that would not only counter the cultural derogation of the female, but perhaps as well enable the daughter to circumvent the mother – to give her the mother she needs instead of the mother she has.

In this first generation of work, there was little sign of the vexation in the mother–daughter relation that would be explored, often with the aid of psychoanalytic tools, a decade or more later. This later work bespeaks a conflict between on the one hand 'feminine' mothers, (ostensibly) inscribed within the father's law, and on the other feminist daughters in open revolt against it. Yet in this next generation of work, the effect of the lack of an alternate symbolic treasury is apparent.

Consider *Casting Off* (Jane Northey, 1983), which depicts a daughter seated in a rocking chair, trying to reproduce the knitting skill of her mother and grandmother. But she cannot get it 'right' and abandons the gender-conformist project. Or *Ritual of a Wedding Dress* (Wendy Walker, 1984), in which a daughter unpacks her mother's wedding dress from a trunk and tries it on (fig. 7): but the dress does not 'fit' (nor does the daughter's intervention undo the coherence and power of this intensive visual symbol). Or b.h. Yael's tellingly titled *My Mother is a Dangerous Woman* (1987): here the



Figure 7



Figure 8

daughter is a writer, blocked, who becomes preoccupied with the story of Demeter (fig. 8). This goddess of Greek mythology descended deep into Hades to pursue and rescue her abducted daughter Persephone. The twentieth-century mother proffers advice on the necessity and naturalness of female accommodation to male authority. That the 'good' towards which she would persuade the daughter is clearly tinged with masochism is, as Kristeva has argued,⁷ fully consistent with the idealized feminine position. These tapes do not enact an extant sense of female subjectivity, but rather articulate problems in attaining to it, problems located specifically around processes of identification at the site occupied by the mother.

Thus *The Influences of My Mother*, with its representation of the mother as woman, agent in history, desiring subject – as well as mother – signals a distinct change in the register by which the mother–daughter relation is articulated. It is a low-budget tape, made on small-format video equipment with minimal production values. Its performance elements are informal, selfconscious and frequently self-indulgent; the camera work is sloppy, the image repertoire limited, the editing imprecise and the sequencing uneven. But despite the many technical flaws in the work, its textual strategies are conceptually sophisticated, mining an awareness of representation as construct, mapping a family narrative outside of patriarchal norms, organizing its representational strategies in an admixture of conventional and innovative narrative codes and organizing an alternative and feminine register of the gaze.

In considering *The Influences of My Mother* in relation to the other works mentioned above, as well as to *Measures of Distance*, the shifts in perspective that these mother–daughter videotapes evidence point to a dynamic interplay between feminist art production, currents of feminist theory, and the conditions of possibility of women's lives. All of these works underscore difficulties in the transaction of psychic and symbolic transformation for daughters seeking the possible terms of their desire. Yet the productions by Diamond and Hatoum suggest a reflection on the difficulties and possibilities of the mother–daughter relation radically different from the principal ways in which this relationship has been taken up as a problematic within psychoanalytic models of feminist criticism over the past decade or more. What is represented in these works is neither an idealization of the mother, nor a merging with her, nor an evacuation of the maternal site, nor an entrapment in the feminine position of abjection and lack, nor a privileging of the pre-Oedipal extralinguistic maternal terrain, nor an *écriture féminine*. The tapes, and the processes they engage, are situated on the side of the symbolic and they navigate a retroaction, within language and culture, that reclaims and reinvests the maternal figure as object of desire *and* as desiring subject.

'How do you go about recreating a once living woman through whom to see yourself?' Diamond asks in off-camera voice. From the start, Diamond makes evident that it is not the 'truth' of the mother that is at stake but her meaning, specifically her meaning to the daughter. The absence of the mother enables the daughter to project upon this figure her own memories, fantasies and wishes. At the same time, the identity of the mother is also retrieved from the empirical evidences of oral narrative, documents, photographs, testimony and the artefacts of personal and social history. But these, too, are partial and selective. Thus she is not only remembered but discovered and invented, not only the object of the daughter's search but the 'subject' thereby retrieved and produced.

In the first of six acts, the camera pans across a photograph of mother and daughter so as to exclude the mother. 'I pushed her away, but to say that it is as though she never existed *is* to acknowledge her presence. She was unknowable, mysterious, larger than life.' In the second act, the photograph from the opening scene is held in the daughter's hand, turned upside-down, the mother becoming a persecutory figure. 'I dreamed recurringly that she led me to the top of a volcano. The trip up was filled with wonder. At the top, she picked me up and threw me off the volcano.' In the third act, the mother is no longer the mother of personal memory but of social archetype, as expressed in popular music. Diamond, microphone in hand, croons along in pantomime to a soundtrack of sentimental tunes on the theme of mother loss, or loss of the love, union and plenitude she symbolizes.

By the fourth act, Diamond is a young adult and her growing physical resemblance to her mother stimulates a renewed interest in her person. 'I searched for a recognition of myself within *her* image. To reconstruct her would be to locate myself.' Here, through the daughter's research, the mother emerges as a subject of history: a communist, a labour organizer, an activist. The daughter begins to situate her mother's personal history within a broader account of social and political history. In the fifth act, the once-deprecated mother attains heroic status. 'My mother had loved me. She threw me *off* that volcano, not into it. She saved me!' In the final act, the psychic register shifts from the imaginary to the symbolic: here, the mother is neither the object of narcissistic need, feared or idealized, nor of a psychic merging precluding separation, but the figure of a partial identification, reconstituted from within a social matrix.

The episodic structure of the tape, with its division into a series of 'acts', foregrounds the 'act' as the staging of a process as much as the separation of sequences, while the mode of direct address foregoes any attempt to render the place of enunciation transparent; rather, it foregrounds the construction of the video object, itself the construction of a subjectivity. Throughout the tape, the photographic image is employed as evidence of history, of desire.

and of loss (of that which it would represent), and these images are organized around the figure of the mother, who is both lost to the daughter and also a figure whose own subjectivity is 'lost' beneath the accumulations of her symbolic cultural meanings.

If the videotape is about a formation of identity, it is also about loss and mourning. Irigaray has drawn parallels between the state of melancholia described by Freud in 'Mourning and melancholia' and the implications for the female child of the discovery of her mother's, and hence her own, 'castration'. 'The little girl's separation from her mother, and from her sex, cannot be worked through by mourning', she writes.⁸ Freud described the successful passage through mourning as one in which the mourner succeeds in psychically internalizing the attributes of the lost object.⁹ And certainly Diamond enacts the stages that mark bereavement. Yet in Diamond's treatment of her history, it is not sufficient for her to incorporate the mother as she has known her. Rather, to complete her mourning, she must establish both a different parent and a different relation to her. This internally reconstructed parent provides a container that can hold Diamond's love and rage; a 'good enough' mother, in D. W. Winnicott's term, whom she can recognize as subject and through whom she can alter her sense of identity. Thus the 'mother' Diamond internalizes and achieves a separation from is not the 'mother' whom she lost.

'To reconstruct her would be to locate myself', Diamond has said. But to 'locate' oneself does not speak of locating the self anew: rather, the implication is that it is a question of locating oneself at all. For Diamond, the locus of possibility of securing a sense of self, of identity, of place, is in relation to the mother. Yet she makes explicit that it is not only the mother as she is (or has been) that is uniquely of import but even what she has aspired to be. The mother's aspirations, however, are ultimately unknowable to the daughter. So again she invents the mother from the residual evidences of her life, and in so doing both makes the tools and employs them to locate herself in relation to the maternal parent rather than *no place*.

Yet what would sponsor this retroaction to reclaim and reinvest the mother? It is in the final act that Diamond makes it explicit that the social ground of feminism is the place from where she is looking in order to look back. In a direct address to the viewer, Diamond specifies the links between her own personal process of maternal reclamation and a larger collective feminist project. She further acknowledges this journey of the self as a process, in which the mother will 'change' as she changes.

In the basic Oedipal scenario, the female's assumption of the normative feminine position is predicated on a repudiation of the 'lack' of the mother—castrate and a turning towards the paternal figure in order to access, by indirect means, the resplendent phallus.

⁸ Irigaray, *Speculum* p. 67

⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and melancholia' in Pelican Freud Library, Volume 11 *On Metapsychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) pp. 245–69

The paternal representative is the agent of separation, the 'third term', effecting the severing of the dyad with the mother and with it the entry into language, symbol and culture. Yet the Oedipal moment, and the identifications that ensue from it, are themselves constituted retroactively. As Kaja Silverman notes: 'The moment isolated by Freud as inaugurating the division of the sexes must be understood as the product of intense cultural mediation, as an event which is experienced retrospectively by both male and female subjects . . . Both refer back their cultural status to their anatomical status after the former has been consolidated, and they do so at the suggestion of the society within which they find themselves'¹⁰

¹⁰ Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 140

The process which Diamond reenacts is likewise a retroaction, and is certainly situated within the conscious level of the secondary psychic processes. Yet it is an account of an experience and a negotiation in which her sense of identity is altered. What *The Influences of My Mother* suggests is the possibility of a retroaction from the side of the symbolic which, albeit at a secondary psychic level, nonetheless has psychic and social consequences. As in the Freudian scenario, Diamond takes up a position of identification with the maternal figure, but she positions herself, and the viewer, not in terms of Oedipal desire and its privileging of the masculine, but in terms of female longing, along the axis of the maternal signifier. In Diamond's narrative, a separation from the mother is effected, but it is not effected through a paternal intervention but rather from within a homosexual economy in which the mother is at once object of identification and agent of separation. The videotape invites speculation as to whether feminism – as a force within the social, political and cultural field – might constitute an alternative, non-patriarchal 'third term' sponsoring a retroaction which activates the negative Oedipus complex and inscribes the maternal, differently, within the symbolic.

As Kaja Silverman has pointed out, the libidinal investment in the mother, the negative Oedipus complex, is the muted parental term within unconscious fantasy, without the representational supports that work to sustain the daughter's unconscious desire for the father. The 'negativity of the negative Oedipus complex'¹¹ is that of a desire out of keeping with paternal law and phallic privilege. The recognition that unconscious desire is 'divided between at least two very different fantasmatic scenes', she argues, enables new discursive and relational strategies for activating the homosexual–maternal fantasmatic scene, and with it both political and libidinal resources.

Silverman insists the mother as unconscious Other is the Oedipal rather than the pre-Oedipal mother – that to suggest otherwise is to give female sexuality an essential content preceding language and symbolic structuration. As she elaborates, 'to situate the daughter's passion for the mother within the Oedipus complex . . . is to make it

¹¹ Kaja Silverman, *The fantasy of the maternal voice*, in *The Acoustic Mirror* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 124

an effect of language and loss, and so to contextualize both it and the sexuality it implies firmly within the symbolic. It is also to bring it within desire, and hence psychic "reality" ' 12 In situating unconscious desire for the mother within the symbolic, Silverman locates it on the side of language rather than outside of representation

Certainly in these videotapes by Diamond and Hatoum, a maternal fantasmatic has been (re)activated. However, the mother-daughter compact which eventuates from this process is represented as, in effect, a renegotiation. The mother as desiring subject has been retrieved from a pre-given maternal position. For Diamond, the mother initially has meaning only in terms of the daughter's primary and narcissistic needs – in particular her need to feel loved rather than abandoned – but her 'meaning' acquires a social valence as the tape proceeds. Thus she is several mothers: a pre-Oedipal mother, feared and idealized within an oscillating imaginary; a mother of social archetype; a mother despised for being insufficiently feminine (like other mothers) by her gender-conformist daughter, a mother as subject and agent of history. In Hatoum's work, the mother is re-situated in a primary position by the once father-favouring daughter but this mother is at once pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, at once body, womanly and maternal, and voice, subject of language, speech, agency, desire. Here, the five-year gap between the visit in which the extraordinary photographs in the work were taken and the materials given symbolic form speaks volumes. What both works suggest is less a preoccupation with a clear division between the Oedipal and the pre-Oedipal than a staging of processes within the round robin of the imaginary/symbolic, processes which break from a patriarchal symbolic subtended by a masculine imaginary.

As Margaret Whitford has succinctly summarized, 'if a female symbolic depends upon a female imaginary, it is also the case that a female imaginary depends upon a female symbolic'.¹³ The female imaginary, she argues, can be seen as the underside, the 'scraps', of the dominant symbolic order, or it can be seen as something yet to be created. 'The female imaginary would be', she writes 'not something lurking in the depths of women's unconscious, but a possible restructuring of the imaginary by the symbolic which would make a difference to women'.¹⁴ Whitford underscores that the creation of a female imaginary is a collective process.

The Influences of My Mother and Measures of Distance suggest that feminism, with its challenge to the dominant symbolic order and its opening up of – and intervening presence within – the terrain of the symbolic, can sponsor such processes. But they further underscore the negotiation with the mother necessary to effect the break from a masculine symbolic, a transaction in which, in these works, the mother is able to assume the position of 'other' – as well as, and instead of, the 'same' both mother and subject. Diamond's

13 Margaret Whitford Rereading Ingaray in Teresa Brennan (ed.) *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* p 119

14 Ibid p 117



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

tape stages processes by which a capture within the imaginary is worked through, distanced from and given symbolic form, while Hatoum works across the Oedipal divide, the irretrievable distance, to embrace the mother anew.

If *The Influences of My Mother* situates the mother–daughter relation within a dyadic economy which absents the father entirely, in *Measures of Distance* there is a triangulation of desires, the father pressing his presence at the edges of the scene, angry and anxious at his exclusion. The mother writes, ‘It’s as if you had trespassed on his property . . .’.

The governing image of this work is a series of still photographs of the mother, taken by Hatoum on a visit to her family in Lebanon five years before the tape was made. The photographs show the mother at her bath, in an extended sequence of documentation of a scene of unusual intimacy, the photographs sensual images of a naked, full-bodied mature woman (figs 9–12). The image of the mother’s body, however, is partially obscured through a second image which overlays it, that of neat delicate rows of handwriting in Arabic script from letters written by the mother to her daughter. Thus Hatoum at once represents the maternal body as the locus of desire and emphasizes, with the scriptface that literally fences the image, the *barrier* to this body produced by language and mediation. The video pictures language as an inscription on/across the mother’s body, but the language of the fathers is here appropriated, used to give voice to the co-respondance between mother and daughter.

The letters are read in voice-over translation by the daughter, creating through language and voice a doubling akin to the doubling that Diamond has produced visually. Yet the doubling of voice as Hatoum reads the mother’s words, the doubling of language as the letters in Arabic are translated into spoken English, underscore that this union of elements also incurs losses. The incommensurabilities of translation are further emphasized by the second element of the soundtrack, an untranslated recording of laughter-punctuated conversation between the pair. These shifts and doublings are matched by slippages and complexities in the categories and stereotypes where the place of the mother is defined, creating the calibrations for the videotape’s many measures of distance.

The layering of sound and image creates a complex oscillation between its different elements. The images themselves shift and alter, at one moment in closeups so tight as to abstract the body, then framed from a distance, a recognizable figure. Yet the images are never completely sharp, and this constant blurring of the image through movement, incomplete detail, framing too close or too distant for clarity, combines with video’s imprecise visual field to create an image that appears *porous*, rendering visually the unfixedness of the object that the tape suggests.

Hatoum’s figuration of the mother can be seen as a critical stance

at odds with the virtual proscription against the imaging of the female body that had assumed a powerful critical consensus in feminist work by the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Hatoum's representations of this female body, and specifically of this maternal body, are mediated to privilege a different modality of viewing: through the privileging of the female spectator, through the grid of language superimposed on the images, through the fluctuations of the image, through the layering of image, taped voices and spoken letters which together situate the narrative and the mother in a feminine scenario unbound from the father's gaze.

The intimacy of the photographs extends to the terms of address and the subject matter throughout the tape. Each letter begins with a salutation to the daughter of touching warmth: 'My dear Mona, the apple of my eyes, how I miss you and long to feast my eyes on your beautiful face that brightens up my days . . .', reads one. Yet the videotape also makes evident that the intimacy and intensity of relation between mother and daughter is in part a new development. As the mother writes: 'I suppose he [Hatoum's father] is wondering why you're not communicating with him in the same way. After all, you've always been your father's daughter and I remember that, before you and I made those tapes and photographs together during your last visit, your letters were always mainly addressing him.' Hatoum, the 'father's daughter', has, like Diamond, become motivated to pursue a different knowledge of and relation to the mother, to locate a new evidence.

The mother embodies fully the feminine maternal aspect in her relation to her child, and the letters vibrate with love and longing for the absent daughter. But through the correspondence with her daughter, the mother begins to articulate for the first time ('You know, I have never talked in this way before') her own desire as a sexual subject. This desire is situated in relation to her marriage, and she urges the daughter to this end – one she equates with sexual pleasure. But her desire also finds expression in an erotics of intimacy that extends to include and embrace the daughter in their shared exploration of their experiences together and apart.

In this exploration, they are outside of the jurisdiction of the husband/father, who is threatened by this intimacy and his exclusion from it: 'We laughed at him when he told us off, but he was seriously angry. He still nags me about it, as if I had given you something which only belongs to him.' *As if*. The proprietorial arrangements of the patriarchal order are seriously undermined in this inscription of another locus and relation of desire. The authority of those cultural and familial limits is at once flaunted and observed through a conspiratorial secrecy, as if such a desire were transgressive, as if it could only be spoken from the margins of the Oedipal boundaries: as if, as in Diamond's video, the exclusion of the father was a necessary precondition for this articulation of a

female subjectivity – a subjectivity of desiring mothers and desiring daughters.

The mother's desire – which in the videotape always begins, by virtue of its epistolary framing, with a loving and maternal enfolding – is seen to be expansive, flexible, extrovert. Significantly, as the daughter undertakes to explore a new relation to her mother, so does the mother expand the nature of her desire in relation to the daughter: thus both mother and daughter, as desiring subjects, each rework the intersubjective self–other, mother–daughter relation. Though the mother declares 'I actually enjoyed the [photo] session, because I felt we were like sisters, close together and with nothing to hide from each other', neither an improbable 'sibling' relationship with the maternal figure, nor a displacement of the father, nor a union with the mother, aptly characterizes the position that Hatoum occupies. The shifting registers and unfixed positions articulate a relationship, a mother–daughter relationship, that occupies no visible place in the archives of the symbolic.

Through their correspondence, the two figures construct a separate and private space, one in which language and emotion are intertwined. This language is neither univocal nor masterful: it is doubled and split, statement and ellipse. There are pauses in the reading and delays in the flow of sound; there are partial references to ongoing dialogues and topics taken up and left behind; there are relays of situations and circuitous movements of narratives. These registers, at once personal and social, are mapped directly onto the body of the mother. She is speaker and spoken, writer and written. Her words are mediated by the daughter – the person to whom the mother speaks, the person who in turn speaks the mother, the person who constructs the object of the mother-as-subject, the person who confronts and represents the gaps, openings, slippages and incommensurabilities at the very centre of an intimate relationship.

The major topic of the letters pertains to their (changing) relationship, but the relation between them is constantly pulled into, and shaped by, the social and political forces that have determined for each of them a situation of exile from the land of their birth: the mother from Palestine, the daughter from Lebanon. The shadow of war presses with increasing urgency in each letter and by the last has forced an end to the possibility of further communication for an indeterminate time. The letters are primarily focused within the close bonds of their interrelationship, yet the very circumstances which surround the writing underscore how subjectivity is determined not only in gender but in a multiplicity of determinants.

In their correspondence, the mother maps onto the daughter's expressed sense of loss – of a 'gap' between her and her mother and an absence of childhood memory of the mother – the story of another loss, the exile from Palestine with its losses of family, of community, of identity.

Yes of course I suppose this must have affected you as well, because being born in exile in a country which does not want you is no fun at all. And now that you and your sisters have left Lebanon, you are again living in another exile, in a culture that is totally different to your own. So when you talk about a feeling of fragmentation and not knowing where you really belong, well this has been the painful reality of all our people

Like Diamond, Hatoum occupies a 'no place', yet here the return to the mother does not presage a solution to the problem of the losses and divisions of the subject. Rather, Hatoum makes explicit the ineradicable exile from the maternal body, and, further, she interweaves this psychosexual loss within other sets of losses, locating the particulars of identity within the specificities of cultural, linguistic, historical and generational boundaries.

At the same time, however, she articulates a realm of pleasure between mother and daughter, refusing – refuting – the order of dereliction and lack, and offering a symbolic construct of intimacy, laughter and love in libidinal, non-phallic intercourse. Loss may be the sponsor of desire, but in Hatoum's work, the daughter's claim on the maternal body (represented in the video's textual strategies as the very sign of the female) is also a claim for the maternal subject, woman and mother – mother and woman.

The Influences of My Mother and *Measures of Distance* are not only autobiographical representations but symbolic constructs that articulate a voice for the mother and a dialogue with her. Yet it must be noted that the principal protagonist in all of the tapes cited here is not the mother. What these narratives trace is not the story of the mother(s), nor even, despite the autobiographical emphases, of the daughter(s), but rather shifts in the ways in which the feminist subject might be said to 'see' and experience (and negotiate) this relation.

In these shifts of perspective can be found evidence of shifts in the currents of feminism itself: from an untheorized celebration of the female sign to an interrogation of femininity as it is constructed in representation and in familial and social relations, from a repression or displacement of the psychic dimension of the troubled mother–daughter relation to its considered exploration, from a preoccupation with 'difference' in relation to the masculine cultural text to an exploration of feminine desire in relation to the other (as) woman.

Further, in their address of the mother–daughter relation, these videotapes, from differing generations of feminist production, demonstrate that there is no stability of meaning in this term. In the very act of symbolizing a cultural absence, replacing silence with speech, this relation is being modified, renewed and reinvented. What is at stake is the articulation of a relationship, a mother–

daughter relationship, culturally unmapped in a symbolic order in which the term of the mother has been one possessed by the sons and fathers

Both Sara Diamond's *The Influences of My Mother* and Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* are available from V Tape 183 Bathurst Toronto Ontario Canada M5T 2R7 tel (416) 863 9897 fax (416) 360 0781 In addition *Measures of Distance* can be obtained from London Video Access 3rd Floor 5-7 Buck St London NW1 8NJ England, tel (071) 284 4588, fax (071) 267 6078 Both distributors are happy to take international orders

Lesbian phantasy and the Other woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*

BRENDA LONGFELLOW

German director Ulrike Ottinger's work spans some eleven films, including five features, and an eight-hour documentary (*Taiga*, 1992) about Mongolia. Not only is she the writer and director of all her work, she frequently occupies the position of camera operator and art director. From her earliest short films documenting performance 'happenings', through the overstated art direction and carnivalistic mixtures of genres, styles and narrative strategies in her features, Ottinger's influence at all levels of production results in films with a very strong and idiosyncratic authorial signature.

Ottinger's style has often been read by feminist critics as a fertile ground for thinking the relationship between feminism and postmodernism. Roswitha Mueller, referring to the brilliant surface textures of her work, suggests that Ottinger 'embraces the notion of surface in much the same sense as the *fin-de-siècle* artists did Rilke . . . who, in his studies of Rodin's sculptures identified surface to be the point where external and internal meet'.¹ Both Miriam Hansen and Sabine Hake² also comment on the desubstantialization of signification in Ottinger's films, noting how her dramatic use of colour, costume, baroque art direction and fascination with surface result in a veritable fetishistic and seductive play of the signifier. For all these critics, however, the attractiveness and significance of Ottinger's grand postmodern *geste* concerns the manner in which it is implicated in a radical rewriting of normative definitions of gender and difference and in an affirmative constitution of a new subject of vision and pleasure.

¹ Roswitha Mueller 'The Mirror and the vamp' *New German Critique* no. 34 (1985) p. 191.

² Miriam Hansen 'Visual pleasure fetishism and the problem of feminine/feminist discourse: Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return*' *New German Critique* no. 31 (1984), pp. 95-108. Sabine Hake 'Gold love adventure: the postmodern piracy of *Madame X'*' *Discourse* vol. 11 no. 1 (1988-9) pp. 88-110.

Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia (1989) fits this critical frame only in a very anomalous manner. The campy aestheticism of the film's first section, with its exaggerated design, caricatured performance numbers and obvious studio setting, clearly conforms to the spirited postmodern play that has come to be seen as the definitive mark of Ottinger's authorial style. The second section of the film (which comprises at least two-thirds of the film's running time), initiated when seven women aboard a train are held up and kidnapped by Mongolian women warriors and taken back to their summer camp, appears as a radical shift in aesthetic. Once liberated from the artificial space of the train, postmodern pastiche appears to yield to a contemplative ethnographic gaze and a documentary-like observation of landscape and Mongolian natives. As Friede Grafe observes: 'The whole film is a twin structure, shot through by doubles, repetitions, similarities and endless reflections. The images have a crease, established by the stories.'³ What I want to explore are the terms of this repetition and doubling as it relates to a new politics of difference.

The film opens with a track through what appears as a nineteenth-century train compartment, past a sumptuous display of oriental objects – vases, screens, embroidery, heavily scrolled wooden chests, masks, tapestries, paintings and artefacts. As the camera roves through this densely signifying space, a woman's voice recites an ancient story of the tundra concerning Yemak Mokeveyn who crossed the Alps in 1581 to confront the Cossacks and Asia for the first time. 'It is always like crossing for the first time,' the voice muses. The sequence ends with a tight shot of Lady Windermere (Delphine Seyrig) gazing out of the train window, a final anchoring of voice to body. The radical exteriority of her voice in this sequence, however, binds it not to any bodily referent, but to the speculative frame of the film itself. She asks:

Was it a confrontation with reality or with the imagination must imagination shun the encounter with reality? Or are they enamoured of each other? Can they form an alliance? . . . Are they changed in the encounter with each other?

The query might well stand as the central philosophical question of the film, a meditation intimately bound up with exploring the process of travel and subjectivity. While the opening sequence frames the voyage of the film within the romantic tradition of the European travelogue (particularly the satiric mode of *Candide* and *Gulliver's Travels*⁴) as an imaginary and fantastic voyage, the question is addressed to the enduring contradictions which emerge in the confrontation of one culture with another.

Clearly, the ideology of travel, an ideology supported through centuries of colonial domination, is centred around the illusion of an unmediated encounter with 'differences'. While travel might be

³ Friede Grafe, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, no. 76 (1990) as quoted in Roswitha Mueller (ed.), *Ulrike Ottinger / A Retrospective* trans. Pamela Selvin (Montreal: Goethe Institute, 1990) p. 7.

⁴ Generously pointed out to me by Barbara Godard.

experienced as a virgin constitution of reality ('always like crossing for the first time'), a confirmation of perceptual mastery and the Eurocentredness of subject vision, it is so only through the repression of its prior textual and cultural mediation, its deformation through the visor of the imaginary.

Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia is structured around a spectacular alliance of reality and the imagination. A tracing of other tracings, the journey of the characters aboard the Trans-Siberian railway is already marked by previous narrative excursions (at one point, a character is shown conspicuously reading Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*) and by the deforming transformations of desire and phantasy.

The characters themselves appear to be formed from an archaic cultural repertoire: Lady Windermere, an aristocratic lady of leisure and amateur anthropologist, Ms Muller-Vonwinkel (Irm Herman), an uptight schoolmistress who defends herself from difference with frequent reference to the facts and figures listed in her official traveller's guide; Fanny Ziegfield (Gillian Scalici), an American musical comedy star; the Kalinke sisters, a Georgian ladies combo (Jacinta, Elsa Nabu, Sevimbike Elibay); and Giovanna, the Johanna d'Arc of the title (Ines Sastre), a young jeans-clad woman, travelling with nothing but a walkman and a knapsack.

Aboard the theatrical space of the Trans-Siberian, the encounter between these characters takes place through the stories and musical numbers they perform for each other. Lady Windermere lures the beautiful Giovanna to her dinner table with the promise of a story about a Mongol princess who has to solve seven mysteries, who vanquishes seven serpents, and so on. The Russian officer, well lubricated by several glasses of vodka, relates the story of his uncle and the building of the Trans-Siberian. The rousing performance of the Kalinke sisters at dinner inspires the two performers aboard, Fanny Ziegfield and Mickey Katz (a hilarious cameo by Peter Dinklage as the 'eloquent tenor of the Yiddish-American musical'), to perform musical numbers from their respective repertoires.

The pleasure of these performances is abetted by the performance of the film itself: the wit of the set design, the characteristic visual extravaganza of colour and textures, most evident in the campy styling and luminous colours of the women's costumes and in the visual lavishness of the sixteen-course feast ordered by Katz: stuffed swan in full plumage, sturgeon in aspic, several different shades of caviar, marinated tree mushrooms, peacock tails. Any sense of real time or historical location is complicated by the melange of historical signifiers, in which nineteenth-century decor and costume mix with the obvious contemporaneity of Fanny Ziegfeld's red leather dress.

Space, too, is figured not with any referential depth but as a two-dimensional space of performance where the landscape outside the

train is indicated only by a pastel blur of a painted backdrop. A station in the Siberian outback is represented by nothing but a flimsy theatrical flat, a cardboard backdrop to a parade of a Russian ladies' marching band, a shaman, peasants selling bread, and various animals.

While the film's first section is marked by this love of artifice, the shift in aesthetic approach in the second section reformulates the epistemological and referential status of the signifier. What are the terms of this shift which is so clearly located in the move from interior to exterior, from the two-dimensional hermetic space of the studio to the panoramic vistas of the Mongolian steppes? At first glance, the shift might be explicated through a series of oppositions corresponding to each section of the film: fiction/documentary, artifice/authentic, west/east, postmodern/ethnographic.

Are these oppositions, however, as rigid as they seem? Are there relations of similarity that cross difference? I would argue that the most compelling way of reading Ottinger's films, as Roswitha Mueller has pointed out, is in connection with their interrogation of the fixity of oppositions, and of sexual opposition in particular.⁵ In that light, the central structural strategy of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* is to create oppositions and simultaneously to deconstruct the apparent intractability of the relation between terms.⁶

We may begin by taking up the opposition fiction/documentary. The apparent shift from the semiotic play of the first section to the ethnographic encounter with 'real' difference is reinforced through the documentary structure and syntax of the second section. Here the long takes, deep focus cinematography and studied observation of Mongolian rituals and customs all seem embedded in a discourse of realism. Ottinger has long had an interest in Mongolia, a place which she admits 'I have always felt particularly drawn to . . . a place I have not only sought, but also researched a great deal' *China: die Kunst, der Alltag/China the Arts, the People*, a four-and-a-half hour documentary completed by Ottinger in 1985, functions as a contemplative observation of the country. In its extensive duration (both the entire film and its individual sequences), in its absence of voice over and in the minimalism of cinematic intervention, Ottinger's *China* film takes ethnographic practice to a new limit.⁷

While this observational style is transported in part into the second part of *Johanna d'Arc*, the performative and narrative elements of this section preclude it from being read as a purely documentary signifier. As Ottinger observes

Perhaps one could say that *China* is the encounter with the foreign, whereas *Johanna* is the performance of that encounter. But to the extent that both encounters actually take place, a 'new realism' arises.⁸

5 Mueller, 'The mirror and the vamp' p. 188.

6 Therese Grisham also reads the film this way, noting 'It would be a mistake to think of these terms as comprising a binary opposition that reinscribes western imperialist categories. Twentieth century theatrum mundi.' Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. *Wide Angle* vol. 14, no. 2 (1992), p. 23.

7 *Taiga* (1992) at 501 minutes, obviously continues Ottinger's revisionary ethnography.

8 Ulrike Ottinger 'Interview with Ulrike Ottinger' in Roswitha Mueller (ed.) *Ulrike Ottinger/A Retrospective*.

In *Johanna d'Arc*, the foreign is not simply encountered as other, but is actively engaged in the staging of the film itself. The Mongol princess and her consort are actors recruited into the film not as markers of unadorned difference but as participants in a series of fictional stagings of cultural confrontation. Ottinger organized the film by announcing a great *nadom*, a Mongol summer festival, and as she notes, 'families, monks, rhapsodists, horse fiddlers and wrestlers came from far and wide to create this festival with me'⁹

The scenes of the encounter between the seven western women and the Mongol warriors are clearly represented as fictional stagings. The women arrive at the Mongol summer resting place after a long procession by camel, foot and horse through the Mongolian desert. They are invited into the Princess's hut to share the famous Mongolian ceremonial welcome: mare's milk and fatty mutton. From there, the fictional encounter occurs as a series of discrete episodes bounded by documentary observations of Mongol rites and customs: the slaughtering of a sheep, the drinking of mare's milk, the movement of yurts and horses across the steppes. The encounters range from humorous mutual curiosity to examples of cultural misunderstanding – as in the scene in which Ms Muller-Vohwinkel hangs her laundry to dry outside, only to discover that such an action represents an unpardonable threat to the Mongol gods of the sky. She is chased by several of the Mongol women who wave sticks and threaten her with violence until the other travellers arrive to sort out the misunderstanding. Significantly, Ms Muller-Vohwinkel, the most recalcitrant of the adventurers in the beginning, is the only one who undergoes a really profound change as a result of her visit to the Mongol people. Out exploring one day, she stumbles into the holy sanctuary of a Mongol priest. The next shot begins with a large blast of smoke as Ms Mueller-Vohwinkel emerges from an open crater on the ground in a charred spiritual robe with her hair standing on end, presumably transubstantiated through the act of spiritual transformation.

10 Mueller 'The mirror and the vamp', p. 179

As is the case with all of Ottinger's work, as Mueller and other critics have pointed out¹⁰, the narrative and fictional frames function only as the slimmest supports and rationalizations for performance. While there is some temporal progression of narrative in *Johanna d'Arc* (concerning the developing intimacy between the Princess and Johanna), this temporal axis is clearly secondary to the critical space of spectacle and performance. The film is rhythmically structured around overt manifestations of spectacle: the bombastic monologue delivered by the representative of a neighbouring tribe; the summer festival itself with its wrestlers and artists, the Princess's narration of an epic tale – all contribute to the sense of decentredness of a narrative which continually veers off into other stories and tales.

I would argue, however, that performance provides a larger conceptual frame in the film, to the extent that all signifiers of

Otherness – the ‘natural’ foreignness of the Mongolian steppes, the ancient ceremonial costumes, the traditional rites and customs – are assimilated into a spectacular performance of Mongolian cultural difference. While these signifiers do have a reference and a relation to actual cultural traditions, what the film insists on, as Ottinger herself has noted, is a ‘new kind of realism’, a hybridization of categories in which the distinctions between fiction and documentary begin to break down

Any attribution of unproblematic realism is thus radically foreclosed as ‘Mongolia’, the site of the fictional encounter, is represented not as ontology or essence but as a recruitment and display of signifiers of difference. While some of the sequences, particularly the slaughtering of the sheep, as Therese Grisham has pointed out¹¹, take on an opacity that reminds the spectator of her position as cultural outsider, this sequence is also embedded within the larger context of performance. In any case, any illusory notion of reading the Mongolian scenes as representations of a purely premodern cultural whole is contaminated by indications of the modern in the frame: the motorcycle (pulled by a horse), the contemporary t-shirts of the children, the fedoras and suit jackets of some of the Mongolian men.

If the apparent opposition between the film’s first and second sections is attenuated through the notion of performance, the connection between the two has to do with desire. In fact, the narrative of *Johanna d’Arc* might well be read as a collective phantasy engendered by the desire for cultural difference planted in the first section. This desire is already there in the orientalist display of objects within Lady Windermere’s compartment and in the striking similarity Lady Windermere observes between Giovanna and a Mongol princess. As Windermere relates the epic tale of a heroic Mongol princess, a narrative space is projected and finally embodied in the arrival of the Princess and her Mongol warriors outside the train. This narrative bears a structural similarity to Ottinger’s *Madame X* (1977), a lesbian sadomasochistic phantasy whose erotic charge is centred on the leather-bound body of the imperious ruler Madame X. As in *Madame X*, the narrative of *Johanna* concerns the sequestering of a group of women who are bound together by their desire for adventure and by their erotic attraction to a female Other.

Ottinger’s interest in the cultural Otherness of Mongolia is preceded, in her other features, by the recurring ironic representation of orientalism. The Chinese cook and Mao Mao, the South Pacific native in *Madame X*, or Hollywood, the faithful Chinese servant in *Dorian Gray*, are culled from the cultural stereotypes of western popular culture and represented through a campy masquerade of crinoline, tacky costumes and fake makeup. Patricia White, commenting on these motifs, notes that ‘Ottinger’s

¹¹ Grisham, ‘Twentieth century theatrum mundi’ p. 25

12 Patricia White, *Madame X of the China Seas* *Screen* vol 28 no 4 (1987) pp 80-96

orientalism is at the same time “Germanic”, an appropriation of the (generally male homosexual) traditions of aestheticism and decadence for lesbian representation, and a provocative masquerade’.¹² While I would agree that the caricatured nature of the orientalist signifier in Ottinger’s work functions to deny any ontological status of the referent, this reflexivity does not entirely liberate the gesture from an orientalist scenario

Indeed, Ottinger’s ‘interest’ in Mongolia might well be situated in relationship to the contemporary moment in which western cultural theory – from Derrida’s deployment of the hieroglyph to elucidate the scriptural origins of language, to Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology, to Barthes’s journeys through the empire of signs in Japan – turns to the East as a site of radical alterity. Perhaps Ottinger’s most direct predecessor in this instance is Julia Kristeva, who crosses the Alps in 1974, little red book in hand, drawn, like Ottinger, not simply by an abstract notion of the East but by difference as it is represented in the bodies of women. Kristeva begins *About Chinese Women* by arguing that there is no point in going to China if one is not interested in the women, for they are the physical matrix where what is different about the East is embodied as a living, breathing cultural memory.¹³

Kristeva’s *About Chinese Women* is not a book of cultural ethnography or sinology. The author does not present herself in this text as a detached observer of empirical verities. ‘We lack,’ she observes (all the time pointing to the imaginary status of this ‘we’), ‘the necessary distance to risk pronouncing more or less conclusive truths about the life and development of the Chinese family and the Chinese women’.¹⁴ Like *Johanna d’Arc of Mongolia*, *About Chinese Women* is a record of a psychic and physical journey in search of a utopian phantasy, already planted within the tenets of Kristeva’s feminism and Maoism. Any definitive separation between observing subject and object is abrogated by Kristeva’s desire for the Other, for her desire to be identified with the heterogeneous and orgasmic body of Chinese women.¹⁵

In this encounter, however, Kristeva is not cowed into silence by the opacity or incomprehensibility of the Other. She writes, and however dissociated this writing is from the kind of ‘radical realism’ that Homi Bhabha associates with orientalism, a knowledge about Chinese women is produced and disseminated.¹⁶ Does the reflexive gesture of her writing, the avowed hesitancy (‘I wish I’d been able to write the bodies of Chinese women . . . the voices of Chinese women’¹⁷), the acknowledgement that writing can only be deferred¹⁸, balance the orientalist presumption in her book that a kind of knowledge can be produced about the Other? This is clearly the central contradiction that runs through *About Chinese Women*.

While acknowledging the dangers of cultural relativism, which she attributes chiefly to the sinologists who have preceded her, Kristeva

13 Julia Kristeva *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Urizen Books, 1977) p. 13

14 *Ibid.*, p. 159

15 As Jane Gallop has pointed out, this identification is particularly apparent in Kristeva’s references to ‘my own consoling childhood in the little red guards and who owe my cheekbones to some Asian ancestor’ (Jane Gallop *The Daughter’s Seduction* (London: Macmillan, 1982) p. 12).

16 Homi Bhabha ‘The other question’ *Screen* vol 24 no 6 (1983) pp 18–37. Homi Bhabha reads *About Chinese Women* (along with Barthes’s *Empire of Signs*) as possessing ‘a will to power and knowledge that in failing to specify the limits of their own field of enunciation and effectivity proceeds to individualize otherness as the discovery of their own assumptions’ (The other question p. 23).

17 Kristeva *About Chinese Women* p. 158.

18 *Ibid.* p. 60.

avows her own 'vigilance': 'call it ethical, that keeps us on our guard not to project onto the women of China thoughts which they may evoke but which, in fact, are the products of western experience and concern that alone.'¹⁹ She will 'refuse', she says, 'to know more than they do' to endow them with a knowledge that would hold the answer to our own problems'²⁰ And yet, this is precisely what she does as she immediately launches, in her first four chapters, into a lengthy elaboration of the history of western monotheism as it evolves into a patriarchal symbolic regime. This excursion through the history of the West both defers, within the overall structure of the book, any immediate or direct encounter with the Other, and constitutes the frame in which the difference represented by China will be deciphered. China is 'invisible', she insists, 'if the man or woman writing from here doesn't position him/herself someplace where our capitalistic monotheistic fabric is shredding, crumbling, decaying'²¹

While the vantage point of observation for the western subject is shifted from the centre to the margin of western culture, is Kristeva's representation of China any less bound to western philosophical categories and concerns? What Kristeva discovers in China is not unadulterated difference but precisely that which has been disavowed by the monotheistic fabric of the West: the surviving traces of a symbolic in which the Mother (not the Phallus) is constituted as the transcendental term. This alternate symbolic system, repressed but never entirely obliterated by Confucianism and the current communist regime, survives, according to Kristeva, in Chinese modes of logic and writing and (most especially) in the 'polymorphic, orgasmic, laughing' bodies of the oriental [M]Other'.²²

If Kristeva's text repeats the orientalist gesture of so much of postmodern theory which reads the East as the limit text and utopian²³ alternative to the West, it does so in full acknowledgement of the contradiction at the heart of orientalism as Homi Bhabha has described it. 'It is, on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery, practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements'.²⁴

These two poles are never reconciled in Kristeva. They persist in a tension that both produces a will to knowledge and undermines the epistemological authority of its own pronouncements. Does this reduce Kristeva's text to another example of ethnocentrism? Perhaps we can only respond by maintaining the duality of that tension: no, for in her avowedly erotic investment in Chinese women, the spectre of essentialism may be more than worth the risk, and yes, because the risk taken is taken on the side of western privilege, a singularly unavoidable failing.

Ottinger's gaze is not dissimilar to Kristeva's in the manner in which desire and phantasy order the relation to a cultural Other. In speaking of *China, the Arts, the People*, Ottinger has observed that:

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 16

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. p. 13

²² Ibid. p. 19

²³ Ottinger. 'My films are utopian in the sense that utopias have no fixed position, either in time or in place. This is how I think of utopias. Therese Grisham, An interview with Ulrike Ottinger. *Wide Angle* vol. 14 no. 2 (1992) pp. 28-36

²⁴ Bhabha. *The other question* p. 24

In my previous films I have dealt with the themes of exoticism, minorities and their differing role behaviour within their own culture. Now I am interested in expanding this theme, in getting to know a 'real exoticism' in a foreign land and in a different culture. I am attempting to conduct a visual discourse with my camera about exoticism as a question of point-of-view – in other words, the film underscores our cultural difference as observers, yet links us to something we share with these people. [the] principle of the film – and the privilege of the visitor – to be able to see another culture selectively, in this instance as a 'real' example of unoppressed Difference ²⁵

²⁵ Interview with Ulrike Ottinger
in Mueller (ed.) *Ulrike Ottinger/A
Retrospective*

Here the attribution of authenticity to the representation of the Mongolian people is already complicated and interrogated by the question of point of view. Seeing the other as a "real" example of unoppressed Difference' does not occur in the realm of nature, Ottinger insists, but is always and already a product of western privilege, a privilege connected to the history of imperialism, colonialism and orientalism. While point of view is clearly foregrounded in the duration of her China film, implicating the spectator in an interrogation of her relationship to cultural Otherness, that interrogation occurs on a different register in *Johanna d'Arc*.

Clearly the gaze, as it functions in *Johanna d'Arc*, is not classically ethnographic in its drive for the production of the Other as knowledge commodity. While such a gaze is ironically represented by the character of Lady Windermere, who negotiates her adventure by taking copious notes and functioning as cultural translator, the primary gaze in the second section of the film is not aligned with hers. Indeed, while Windermere functions as a central narrative agent aboard the Trans-Siberian, rescuing Giovanna from the third-class coach, relating stories and organizing social events, by the time the film moves into the Mongolian exterior her narrative presence has become more and more marginalized. At that point, the gaze rather becomes the means, as it does in *About Chinese Women*, for the constitution of a utopian phantasy organized within a homosexual economy of desire and visual pleasure. Homosexuality, however, has a very different inflection in the work of Ottinger than it does in Kristeva's. For the latter, homosexual desire is consistently pulled into the maternal, bound to the pre-Oedipal relation between mother and daughter ²⁶

²⁶ Kristeva *About Chinese Women*
p. 28

By contrast, in *Johanna d'Arc* homosexual desire is radically de-Oedipalized and reinscribed as the desire for a female cultural Other. Judith Mayne has observed, in a reading of *Bildnis einer Trinkerin/Ticket of No Return* (1979) that Ottinger's lesbianism is not translated in any direct fashion into her text. Although there are explicit lesbian references in Ottinger's work (the iconography of

²⁷ Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 146.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

lesbian sadomasochism in *Madame X*, the lesbian bar scene in *Ticket of No Return*, the leather-clad chorus of gay men in *Freak Orlando* [1981], and a recurring motif of crossdressing and gender instability in all performances), lesbianism informs Ottinger's films not primarily or predominantly as a diegetic element but as a kind of fantasmatic that is centrally concerned with 'eroticizing the thresholds between women'.²⁷ Ottinger's films, Mayne writes, demonstrate a recurring 'preoccupation . . . with women as both like and unlike each other, with separation and desire, projection and distance as the forces that determine women's relationships to each other'.²⁸

The preoccupation with thresholds of similarity and difference between women functions on two levels in *Johanna d'Arc*. At the level of the diegesis, lesbianism is certainly hinted at in the attraction Lady Windermere feels for Giovanna and in the discreet sleeping arrangements where Giovanna first shares the train compartment of Lady Windermere and then abandons her on the invitation of the Mongol Princess. It is this chain of desire and substitution that propels the temporal evolution of the narrative. Giovanna functions as a pivotal figure of desire in this movement, because of her ability to cross the thresholds of cultural difference. Once ensconced in the Mongol summer camp, she dons bits of Mongol clothing, a hat, and a vest over her blue jeans, and takes to riding with the Princess, to learning the language, and finally to sharing the yurt of the Princess herself.



Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia
(courtesy of Women Make Movies)

At the level of the gaze, the predominance of female characters (and the marginality of male characters) determines the gaze as a look between women. Within the diegesis, however, this look is not

bound to the usual narrative syntax of shot/reverse-shot, with its implication of subject-centred vision and its erotic investment in the power dynamics of voyeurism. On the contrary, the look in *Johanna d'Arc* is fully reversible, to the extent that both westerners and Mongol women are variously represented as the objects of a mutual look. Moreover, given the near absence of reverse shots, the primary gaze in the film is not exclusively determined by narrative motivation nor bound, as such, to any particular character. The look does not carve out vision, for it is, rather, constituted and returned as an effect of an extravagant and exhibitionist display of images.

The 'near' absence of reverse shots notwithstanding, there is one sequence in particular in which the exchange of looks reaches a certain murderous crescendo. This involves a hunt in which the victim of the game – as it is constituted through the crosscut looks of the Mongol women warriors, the tensing of their bows, and the panicked look of Lady Windermere – is Giovanna herself. Wearing a large fur hat and rustling through the grass, she becomes animal in a vertiginous displacement of the gaze. Here, more than at any other moment in the film, the mise-en-scene of lesbian desire is divorced from any phantasy of complete mutuality or maternal overtones, in a manner which reminds us of the inevitable aggression and difference in any erotic relation.

In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis argues that the marks of female authorship have to be elaborated beyond a discussion of the gaze in order to consider how a film creates a space for a female spectator. In *Johanna d'Arc* that space is directly aligned with the primary look of the camera, a look orchestrated by Ottinger who is both director and cameraperson. Divorced from the mediating gaze of a character, the spectator is directly addressed by the film through its emphatic repetition of spectacle and a performance organized, as I have suggested, as a mise-en-scene of erotic phantasy. This presentational aspect of the film needs to be distinguished from the conventional inscription of spectacle, identified by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', where pleasure is grounded in the gendered appeal of voyeurism and fetishism. To be sure, visual pleasure in *Johanna d'Arc* is bound up with the specularization of women's bodies, the brilliant textures of their costumes and the compelling exotic quality of the Mongolian landscape. The spectator, however, is not seduced into a phantasy of illicit viewing but is proffered an invitation to play, an invitation to invest, as a woman looking at other women, in the erotic phantasy which is the film.

This quality of *Johanna d'Arc* uncannily echoes Gaylyn Studlar's description of a masochistic aesthetic in which the repudiation of the phallus frees the subject into polymorphous play and female adventuring. As she argues, the refusal of identification with a paternal order results in an economy of narcissism and exhibitionism.

²⁹ Therese Grisham makes a similar point when she argues that Ottinger's film is not about laying bare the external and internal processes of subjectification in order to seek new subjectivities for women: as Ottinger's characters are already and without a doubt the subject of their own adventures. *Twentieth century theatrum mundi* p. 26

³⁰ B. Ruby Rich, 'When difference is more than skin deep' in Marsha Gever, John Greyson and Prathiba Parmar (eds) *Queer Looks* (New York: Routledge and Between the Lines Press, forthcoming)

³¹ Linda Nochlin, 'The imaginary Orient', *Art in America*, vol. 71 no. 5 (1983) p. 126

³² Miriam Hansen, 'Visual pleasure, fetishism and the problem of feminine/feminist discourse' p. 102

and in an anarchic liberation of the imagination in which phantasy is not simply content but a formal means of expression ²⁹

The erotic appeal of the phantasy in *Johanna d'Arc*, however, does not inhere only in the gynocentric nature of its display and address. As suggested above, this phantasy is not based on mutuality nor on an Irigarayan scenario of symmetrical reflection and merging of two like female bodies. Difference is central to its constitution

In an extremely interesting article (which has provided the most provocative frame for theorizing the different economy of pleasure in *Johanna d'Arc*³⁰) Ruby Rich argues that race occupies a very specific, and eroticized, position within the lesbian community. As 'a strategy for maintaining eros' racial difference, she argues, occupies the place vacated by the gender difference of heterosexual couplings. She goes on to quote Linda Nochlin's commentary on nineteenth-century French orientalist painting wherein the 'conjunction of black and white, or dark and light female bodies, whether naked or in the guise of mistress and maid servant, traditionally signified lesbianism'.³¹ *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* repeats this erotic scenario of orientalism, mediating lesbian desire through the desire for a racial and cultural other.

It is this particular structuration of lesbian desire which marks the radical emergence of a new economy of visual pleasure and a new social subject in Ottinger. While many critics have situated Ottinger's investment in specularity in relation to the concept of fetishism, arguing, as Miriam Hansen does, that fetishism be read as an indicator of a gay sensibility in which the sexual aim is dispersed onto the textures of surfaces³², the psychical economy of fetishism does remain within the province of a paradigm of castration, lack and disavowal. Even if castration is interpreted in its less literal sense as anxiety around difference, the model sits uneasily on *Johanna d'Arc*, for here difference does not provoke anxiety – it is, precisely, the lure and the cause of desire.

It was noted earlier that one of the defining characteristics of recent feminist films is their particular attentiveness to multiple categories of difference which inflect both the formal articulation and the thematic content of the films, constructing a space for the spectator as a space of heterogeneity. This space in *Johanna d'Arc* is represented not so much as a site of conflicting discursive positions (as it is in Yvonne Rainer's *Privilege* [1990]), but as an invitation to phantastical voyage and eroticized encounter with an Other. The narrative subject and the spectator of Ottinger's film do not defend themselves against difference: they let difference in and allow themselves to be transformed in the process.

But this difference, as Ottinger so cunningly reminds us, is always a matter of perspective and point of view. At the end of the film when the women have been returned to the train, Lady Windermere is invited to share the luxury compartment of yet another Mongolian

princess, who, in her aristocratic bearing, age and class (not to mention the classy Chanel-type suit), represents a more likely object for Lady Windermere's erotic interest. As the train winds its way past hydro poles through the Mongolian steppes, Lady Windermere observes

In Paris, at the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliotheque Nationale, I saw a remarkable engraving showing how Louis XV amused himself by having his entire court appear in Chinese costume

The Princess retorts that

On the other hand, a painted mirror in our summer palace shows ladies-in-waiting drinking in rococo costumes

Lady Windermere replies finally that

Our rococo would be unthinkable without the interpretation of Chinese art in 'Chinoiserie'. The mutual exotic attraction has a long history

Technology, paranoia and the queer voice

ELLIS HANSON

Through drugs, or perhaps via the sharpening or even mechanical amplification of latent ESP functions, it may be possible for each partner to simultaneously experience the sensations of the other, or we may eventually emerge into polymorphous sexual beings, with the male and female components blurring, merging and interchanging. The potentialities for exploring new areas of sexual experience are virtually boundless.

Stanley Kubrick¹

He believed that he had a mission to redeem the world and to restore it to its lost state of bliss. This, however, he could only bring about if he were first transformed from a man into a woman.

Court Judgement, referring to Schreber²

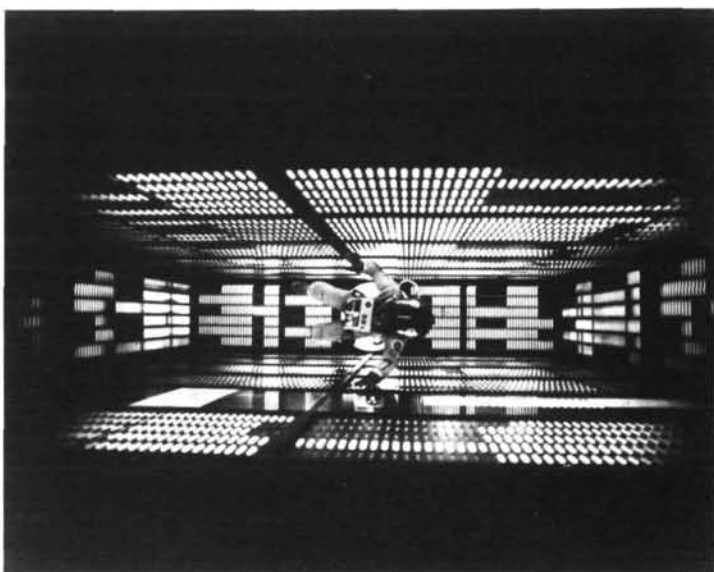
It is curious that Stanley Kubrick requires technological assistance to engage in the sort of 'blurry' sexual behaviour that comes quite easily to a great many people who are, shall we say, less invested in normative heterosexuality. Daniel Paul Schreber, whose memoirs inspired Freud's most important work on paranoia, only needed God and his imagination. Kubrick is almost radical in his sexual politics, except for the fact that these remarks originally appeared in *Playboy*, a magazine whose view of sexuality is less than innovative. With his emphasis on the 'polymorphous' play of gendered 'components', Kubrick does seem to gesture vaguely in the direction of the queer. By 'queer', I mean the odd, the uncanny, the undecidable. But, more importantly, I refer to 'queer' sexuality,

¹ From Kubrick's 1968 *Playboy* interview, reprinted in Jerome Agel (ed.), *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* (New York: New American Library, 1970) p. 346.

² Quoted in Sigmund Freud, 'Psychoanalytic notes on an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia (dementia paranoides)' (1911) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955–1974) vol. 12 p. 16.

that no-man's land beyond the heterosexual norm, that categorical domain virtually synonymous with homosexuality and yet wonderfully suggestive of a whole range of sexual possibilities (deemed perverse or deviant in classical psychoanalysis) that challenge the familiar distinctions between normal and pathological, straight and gay, masculine men and feminine women. Kubrick's vaguely queer musings on the future of sexuality, inspired apparently by his work on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), bring together two points about the film that I would like to expand upon here: sexual transformation, and technology as a sexual prosthetic device.

2001: A Space Odyssey
(courtesy of BFI stills archive
and Turner Pictures)



Whether by accident or by necessity, the age of technology is concomitant with the age of desire, rendering postmodernity peculiarly susceptible to the romance of people for their machines. What am I doing when I express desire through technology, or when electric speech becomes the voice of love? What happens when this electric voice of love is a queer voice? Does Kubrick see the gender-bending voice of the HAL computer in *2001* as a precursor of a technosexual revolution and, if so, then why is HAL the focus of a science-fiction nightmare? My juxtaposition of Kubrick with Schreber raises still other questions about Kubrick's scenario. Is the queer voice of HAL so very different from the voices that Schreber hears, those voices hostile and divine, enigmatic and telephonic, that talk him through his transformations into Miss Schreber, into the wife of God of the Prince of Hell, into the seer of spirits and the redeemer of the world? Kubrick and Schreber each offer a version

of human redemption, and each has a utopian vision that first takes a terrifying turn through paranoia and sexual transformation

The connection between paranoia and cinema, not to mention criticism on the subject, has already developed into a major tradition. The suspense or horror film, where repressed desire gains hallucinatory palpability as the beast in the closet, is only the most noted genre in this respect. While mainstream cinema has traditionally avoided explicit representations of lesbians and gay men, it has nevertheless developed paranoia into an important marketing strategy – and the parallel history of paranoia and homosexuality in classical psychoanalysis is well known. In the Schreber case, Freud noted that paranoia always seems to be caused by repressed homosexuality, and his colleague, Sándor Ferenczi, was quick to add that paranoia is merely homosexuality ‘in disguise’³

While Freud’s insistence upon a link between paranoia and homosexuality has suffered a great deal of criticism, Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, and Patricia White, among other feminist film theorists, have explored at length the connections between filmic pleasure, the disembodied voice, female paranoia and female homosexuality in classic cinema. The heroine, stalked by an embodiment of her repressed desire, perhaps even her own seductive voice, is a familiar cinematic trope. This scenario is important to gay film theory as well, since the demonization of the gay man in the film is often a paranoid function of homophobia. The gay man in mainstream cinema, more often than not, is less a character than a symptom in the narrative articulation of masculinity. He is the return of the repressed. He is the question of queerness – of male femininity, of desire between men – an essentially disruptive question raised and violently dismissed in the course of the film. He stands precariously on the margins of the conventional subject–object relationship of man to woman, his very exclusion in answer to the question that he raises. He is the villain to be abused, murdered or anxiously domesticated in order to preserve a coherent and conventional masculinity elsewhere.

2001 is extraordinary in this paranoid tradition in that it brilliantly evokes the destabilizing eroticism of technology through the queer voice of HAL. Furthermore, the film’s attempt at closure, at dismantling HAL on the way to idealizing the relationship between man and his machines, obscures a degree of disruptive ambivalence toward technology that persists even to the final, triumphant frames. In this way, while *2001* is a fine example of the paranoid tradition on film, its eroticization of technology helps to undermine its own attempt at constructing a stable masculine subject. This persistent instability gestures toward the possibility of a radical jouissance in paranoid narratives. For this reason, I am proposing another odd juxtaposition by comparing *2001* to a more recent film. Pedro Almodóvar’s *La ley del deseo/Law of Desire* (1987). In Almodóvar’s

3 Ibid. p. 59, Sándor Ferenczi ‘On the part played by homosexuality in the pathogenesis of paranoia’ (1912), in *Sex in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (New York: Dover, 1956) p. 133.

film, queer voices are disembodied and projected through machines – through a telephone, a television, a typewriter, and so on. After the fashion of HAL, these voices function as a destabilizing force in the narrative, undermining attempts at repression and closure. While Kubrick resists the queer voice of technology, Almodóvar's camp style delights in it. These two films, in my view, represent two very different functions of the disembodied voice in cinema: the paranoid defence of horror and the paranoid pleasure of submission. Both functions may be seen in the Schreber case: the difference between Schreber's horror at his desire to be fucked as a man, and his pleasure at the thought of being fucked as a woman.

Speculations about the sexuality of HAL have been proliferating and suppressed ever since the film first opened. All of these readings are based on the sexual ambiguity of HAL's voice, but the question of HAL's sexuality is often quickly dismissed by readings that insist upon the asexuality of machines and the asexual alienation of men in space. Critics have rarely warmed to the notion of computer love in the manner of Donna Haraway in a recent interview: 'I would rather go to bed with a cyborg than a sensitive man, I'll tell you that much'.⁴ Or by Kubrick himself in a comment that prefigures Haraway: 'There is a sexiness to beautiful machines . . . We are almost in a sort of biological machine society already'.⁵ The very language that critics have used to describe HAL demonstrates the paradox of asexuality and oversexuality characteristic of a long tradition of representing the android and the androgyne.⁶ Pauline Kael is notably frank in her description of HAL as a 'rejected homosexual lover', but the range of interpretations is suggestive: HAL has a 'passionless almost homosexual voice', he is an androgyne, he is 'epicene', 'neuter, neutral' and 'sterile' – one critic hazarded the somewhat less than courageous epithet '(gay?)'. HAL is a 'monster', 'berserk', 'hysterical', 'a fussy genius', he is 'neurotic' and experiences a 'paranoid breakdown'. 'His "voice" is bland, neutral, reassuring, and also ambiguous, sinister, untrustworthy'. As a coalescence of the maternal and narcissistic preoccupations of this film, Penelope Gilliatt's description of HAL is as brilliant as it is bizarre: 'He gives a lot of thought to how he strikes others, and sometimes carries on about himself like a mother fussing on the telephone to keep a bored grown child hanging on'. My own personal favourite comes from Don Daniel's review: 'HAL's faggoty TV-announcer tones and vocabulary become the disembodied voice of three centuries of scientific rationalism'.⁷ Beware the faggoty techno-vampire! He leaps through your television screen and your movie screen, bearing with him all the evils of modern science and psychiatry, infecting you with his queer undecidability and reviving in you curious dreams about your mother. The queer voice, traditionally a bearer of anxiety, illicit pleasure, and fear, becomes in *2001* the very ghost in our machines,

4 Constance Penley and Andrew Ross 'Cyborgs at large: an interview with Donna Haraway', in *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) p. 18.

5 Quoted in William Klonan 'In 2001 will love be a seven-letter word?' *The New York Times*, 14 April 1968 p. D15.

6 See Janet Bergstrom 'Androids and androgyny' *Camera Obscura*, no. 15 (1986), pp. 36–65.

7 See Pauline Kael *5001 Nights at the Movies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991) p. 800. Penelope Gilliatt 'After man' *The New Yorker*, vol. 44, no. 8 (1968), pp. 150–52; Renata Adler, '2001 is up, up and away' *The New York Times*, 4 April 1968 p. 58. Louise Sweeney's review quoted in Agel *The Making of Kubrick's 2001*, pp. 227–29. Judith Shatnoff 'A gorilla to remember' *Film Quarterly*, vol. 22 (1968), pp. 56–62. Don Daniels '2001: A Space Odyssey – a sleep and a forgetting', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1968) pp. 167–71. and Alexander Walker *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972) pp. 252 and 285.

a mode of articulating horror and repressed desire in a culture of technology. I would argue that *2001*, like many of its reviews, gives an anxious audience an art form through which to act out sexual anxieties and at the same time to distance them and control them. HAL's queerness is suggested but suppressed, owned but quickly disowned, acknowledged but unexplored.

What many reviews imply, and would assert, is that HAL's queerness is just one aspect of a panicky regression to narcissism articulated throughout *2001*. The appearance of a link in this film between narcissism and the queer voice should come as no surprise, given the importance of narcissism in Freudian theories of paranoia and homosexuality. Briefly, in the narcissistic paradigm for the etiology of male homosexuality, a man disavows symbolic castration by identifying with his infantile phantasy of a phallic mother and taking himself as the object of his own desire. This narcissistic construction is by no means peculiar to psychoanalysis: one need only consult the myriad cultural representations of gay men as mentally ill, passive, selfish, exhibitionistic, fascist, deadly, fixated on their mothers, and so on. What is striking about *2001* in this respect is the way it produces an all-male environment in which erotic tension is produced through mirroring effects, doubling, and symbolic infantilization. Enter the 'faggoty' voice of HAL, and this narcissistic tension cannot help but take on homoerotic accents, especially where the film is viewed in a social context in which the links between narcissism and homosexuality are already in place. One could argue that Kubrick does for the space programme what Melville does for shipping: he articulates the tensions and erotic ambiguities that complicate the distinction between the homosocial and the homosexual within communities of men.

The sheer maleness of *2001* is striking. A number of feminist readings have pointed out the gradual disappearance of women from the film.⁸ While Russian women might hold professional positions of power as Cold War enemies in Kubrick's world, North American women are still relegated to familiar, marginalized roles such as homemakers, flight attendants and receptionists. By the film's end, women have vanished entirely, replaced by a startling image of an extrauterine foetus, a Star Child, conceived and nurtured by men and their machines. The progress of the film marks the end of man's need not only for woman, but for the earth, the body, and sexual reproduction; and this progression reproduces the narrative of the separation of the male child from his mother, his accession to an autonomous masculine identity, and his discovery (like Kubrick's apemen) of the phallic tool of abstract reason. In a sense, men become (at least in phantasy) like HAL in that they no longer seem to require a body, sex, life support, or contact with the earth. One of the radical insights of psychoanalysis, however, is that the mother can never be lost and the body never erased. They are merely

⁸ For an excellent feminist reading of the sexual politics of *2001* see Zoe Sofia 'Exterminating fetuses: abortion, disarmament and the sexo-semiotics of extraterrestrialism', *Diacritics* vol. 14 no. 2 (1984) pp. 47–59. Also of interest is Judith A. Spector's discussion of *2001* and so-called 'womb-envy', *Literature and Psychology* vol. 31, no. 1 (1981) pp. 21–32.

repressed, and so this progress is in fact a false utopian narrative produced through repression and rigid libidinal organization. In *2001*, this psychoanalytic insight is realized in the return of the repressed through HAL: the unconscious resuscitation of femininity, maternity, the body, and desire within the homosocial economy of the space mission. HAL has so thoroughly reproduced the psyche of man that he seems (unlike Haraway's cyborg) to have an unconscious, or different levels of consciousness working at once. He has a capacity for error, he has a memory, even a memory of his birth as a conscious entity on 12 January 1992, he even has a memory of a lullaby of words, 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do', a love song he once sung with his instructor, Mr Langley, and sings again in his surrender of consciousness to the astronaut, Dave Bowman. Narcissistic desire for fusion with the lost mother is resuscitated as symptomatic of the hypermasculine mission of transcendent self-realization through scientific rationalism. Man the scientist, having transformed the discourse of knowledge into a rigidly defined identity, nevertheless rediscovers his body and his repressed unconscious along the inverted ladder of his own mastery. In short, he rediscovers repressed desire through the voice of HAL, his own machine, created in his own image.

The evidence of this return of the repressed maternal signifier is everywhere apparent. The phallic bone of the apeman is transformed in the flick of a frame into a spaceship that enacts a kind of zero-gravity coitus with another rotating spaceship, a round one with an entry in the middle. But beyond this heterosexual daydream, the spaceships seem to have an androgynous or bisexual quality. The phallic or spermatoc aspect of Dr Floyd's shuttle and the *Discovery* is modified by their womblike containment of life and life-support systems. Furthermore, the voyagers on board these spaceships enjoy a floating, hypnotic, amniotic existence. Dr Floyd holds the important women in his life at a telephonic distance – his daughter, his wife, the babysitter – only to find himself waited on by smiling mother-substitutes who feed him liquid food from cartons nipples over with straws. Distinguished scientists in technological swaddling clothes sleep dreamlessly on life support, with intimations of the horror of mummification. Dave Bowman and Frank Poole, who are both paragons of scientific training and masculine self-restraint, find themselves eating what looks like technicolour babyfood and being waited on by HAL, whom one critic has referred to as 'the biggest mom of all'.⁹

Even the baldly paternal symbolism of the monolith has its infantile and maternal aspects. The monolith is vaguely phallic in shape and masculine in its austerity; it is the ultimate bearer of the Word, literally humming with the evidence of higher intelligence and pedagogical intentions. But the erotic ambiguity of the monolith may be glimpsed in what is perhaps an unintentionally suggestive

⁹ Daniels, *2001: a new myth*, p. 6.

comment made by a reviewer: 'Kubrick stylizes the moment of the birth of human consciousness with the presence of the monolith and *musique concrète* by Gyorgy Ligeti howling from the soundtrack like a collage of all the world's religious music.'¹⁰ 'Birth' and 'howling' would seem to disrupt the harmonious organization of any religious 'collage'. The bizarre, ecstatic, deafening, heterogeneous voices of the monolith, a mixture of recordings by Ligeti and Kubrick, are disturbing in that they are as perverse and profane as they are divine. I am reminded of Lacan's discussion of god and feminine jouissance. What is the jouissance of this monolith? What is the nature of its incomprehensible, seductive, strangely religious but in the end undecidable voice? Like HAL's voice, this other voice of higher, perhaps hostile, perhaps divine, certainly alien intelligence, speaks with an uncanniness that paradoxically harks back to presymbolic utterance.

Another peculiarity of the monolith is its function as both phallic icon and birth canal. It is a door at once closed and open. Its smooth, black impenetrability when touched by the apes and Dr Floyd comes unhinged in Jupiter space. Its blackness becomes penetrable as the darkness of an abyss, the opening to a space which is the very collapse of time and space – the maternal passageway for Bowman's psychedelic, nonverbal, perhaps preverbal journey. In the novel *2001*, Arthur Clarke plays on this notion of the phallic-vaginal symbol: 'Impossibly, incredibly, it was no longer a monolith, rearing high above a flat plain. What had seemed to be its roof had dropped away to infinite depths; for one dizzy moment, he seemed to be looking down a vertical shaft – a rectangular duct which defied the laws of perspective . . .'¹¹ The use of the word 'shaft' here is a telling pun: 'shaft' as phallic rod or weapon but also 'shaft' in the sense of 'elevator shaft', the dizzying duct, serviceable of course, but fatal when the cable snaps.

This disorienting and paradoxical collapse of sexual difference, construed psychoanalytically, appears to be symptomatic of a regression to the proto- or pseudo-genitality of the anal-sadistic phase. 'According to Freud, the faecal mass or "stick" foreshadows the genital penis, the production of stools becomes a prototype of childbirth (the infantile sexual theory of giving birth through the anus), the daily separation from the faeces is a precursor of castration, and excrement in the rectum anticipates genital coitus.'¹² Kubrick's monolith, with its uncanny voices and sleek black geometry, presents an imperfect idealization of the faecal-phallic stick. The monolith's function as shaft suggests the perverse collapse of phallus and orifice, of genital and pregenital pleasure, whose 'unmeaning' is deflected into a pseudodivine enigma. The monolith functions metonymically in the film, and its inscrutability may be seen as the sublimation of anal drives – the drive to death, error, confusion, so subversive of the film's technological utopianism –

11 Arthur C. Clarke *2001: A Space Odyssey* (New York: New American Library, 1968) p. 190. See also Spector, 'Science fiction and the sex war' p. 27.

12 See Sigmund Freud, 'On transformations of instinct, as exemplified in anal erotism' (1917) *Standard Edition*, vol. 17, p. 131. This neat synopsis is quoted from Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1984), pp. 11–12.

reconstrued more safely as a deified ‘intelligence’ What is somehow ‘beyond the phallus’ is projected onto the nonspace of Jupiter space and construed as ‘out of reach’.

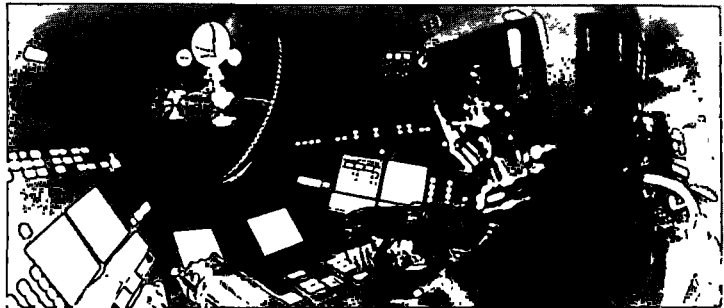
The ‘faecal’ reading of the monolith is further supported by the recurrence of bathrooms in the film: the famous zero gravity toilet (where Dr Floyd is once again obliged to confront the perils of toilet training), Rachel the babysitter in the bathroom, and finally the ‘ideal’ bathroom near the end of the film There is also the inert asteroid, strangely turdlike, that hurls past the *Discovery* as Poole makes his first trip out in the pod; and this asteroid prefigures Poole’s death, his dead body rotating in space, reinforcing the connections between death drive, anality, and the unburied corpse One might also consider the deliberate burial of the monolith on the moon, or its sudden appearance one morning on the prehistoric plain In Clarke’s novel, the first appearance of the monolith is preceded by the clank of metallic feet striking stones and uprooting bushes, as though some space-age dinosaur were passing in the night, dropping a gift of encoded dung. Like Schreber, the apes hear voices that seem to persuade and inform, voices that are taken for divine. The string of associations developed here – obedience to mysterious voices, divinity, excretion, jouissance – should come as no surprise to the psychoanalyst, who finds in the case of Schreber a paranoid model for such divine ‘evacuation’: ‘the process is always accompanied by the generation of an exceedingly strong feeling of spiritual voluptuousness.’¹³

Even the very poetry of space travel, performed at first to the waltz of ‘The Blue Danube’, suggests both a displaced eroticism and a mystification of modern technology. Gentle rotation and curving architectural lines are a repeated motif, slowly rendered sinister through the changing mood of the musical score. The graceful and disorienting rotation of circular spaces, including the figure of a female flight attendant in phallic costume defying the audience’s experience of gravity, recalls the connection between rotation, ego disintegration and anal pleasure in neurotic discourse.¹⁴ Furthermore, the equally graceful schmaltz of ‘The Blue Danube’, a throwback even in its own time, links this rotating pleasure with the progress of

¹³ Quoted in Freud, *Psychoanalytic notes on an autobiographical account*, p. 27

¹⁴ See Robert Fliess, *Symbol, Dream and Psychosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1973) pp. 101–6

2001 *A Space Odyssey*
(courtesy of BFI stills archive
and Turner Pictures)



modern science, generating a nostalgic sense of continuity between the space age and the waltz age, 2001 and the Enlightenment. This nostalgia turns to pensive moodiness, however, with Khatchaturian's 'Gayne Ballet Suite', which accompanies the scene where an astronaut jogs and shadow boxes in a circle inside a centrifuge, again defying the audience's experience of gravity. Finally, nostalgia gives way to anxiety and terror. The musical soundtrack is replaced by menacing silence or by the labour of human breathing, as when Poole ventures out in the pod and ends up rotating gently through space in a zero-gravity *Totentanz*. The changing score and the poetic continuity of rotation emphasize the slow and sinister shift toward the paranoid plot and the astronauts' growing distrust of the HAL computer.

HAL turns *2001* into a 'maternal horror' film, despite the virtual absence of mothers. As Julia Kristeva has written, horror and abjection are perverse celebrations of a phantasy of the maternal body. 'But devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what follows from the other's 'innermost being', for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside the maternal body.'¹⁵ In reading the vaginal or maternal imagery of the film as anal, I find that *2001* articulates a homoerotic phantasy of male maternity, of maternity between men, and the concomitant phantasy of anal childbirth. Schreber still haunts us. 'Something occurred in my own body', he writes, 'similar to the conception of Jesus Christ in an immaculate virgin, that is, in a woman who had never had intercourse with a man.'¹⁶ Ironically, Kubrick's earlier name for HAL was Athena, recalling the asexual birth of the virgin goddess of wisdom from the head of Zeus (or the Roman Jupiter). Presumably, the Athena voice was rejected for HAL's sexually ambiguous voice in order to avoid any heterosexual implications, but Kubrick succeeded in producing homosexual implications instead. At this point in the film, the anal-sadistic focus is HAL, HAL's focus, his mechanical gaze and technified speech from which it is impossible to hide. HAL replaces women and the Russians as the principle justification the film has to offer for the paranoid sensation of persecution. I hear his ubiquitous voice, and I see his ubiquitous eye. This eye, a deep lens which might also be his ear, is odd in that it is both a protrusion and a hole and is the passageway for both his gaze out and my gaze in. One critic even noted that HAL has a 'red eye shaped like a female breast'.¹⁷ His eye-ear is at once a male and female protrusion, but also an orifice, filled with the red light of danger signals and the yellow light that also glows in the eyes of the leopard in the apeman sequence. With the dispersal of HAL's voice and gaze, HAL's presence becomes difficult to locate except in a fetishistic fixation on certain objects, like the memory banks or the lens. HAL's presence is so diffuse that the ship itself becomes his body, a male body, or at any rate an

15 Julia Kristeva *Powers of Horror* (1980) trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 54

16 Quoted in Freud, 'Psychoanalytic notes on an autobiographical account' p. 32

17 Shatnoff 'A gorilla to remember' p. 60

2001: A Space Odyssey
(courtesy of BFI stills archive
and Turner Pictures)



androgynous one, with doors and passageways, voice and vision and memory, and even little spermlike babylike homunculi called 'pods' that can be ejected from the main ship. The astronauts, Bowman and Poole, are in this sense functioning inside HAL's body; they are integral parts of it.

This male interiority, isolated in outer space, is the site of highly sublimated narcissistic play in the name of modern science. When not tinkering, jogging, shadow boxing, or sunlamp bathing (to name a few of their more autoerotic activities), the two men engage in duties where they seem to mirror or complement each other. In fact, they look so much alike, it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart. There is also the self-reflexive entertainment of watching themselves on a BBC broadcast. But this pleasure always remains unconscious, its erotic meanings sacrificed to the SF pretext and the exigencies of living in space. In fact, one of the most disturbing scenes is Poole's death, but Bowman dutifully represses any emotional vulnerability he might experience at the loss of his virtual twin. And yet, when Bowman retrieves Poole's body and the devious HAL locks them out of the main ship, Kubrick offers us a stunning image with subtle homoerotic implications, that of Bowman as the Madonna. Inside a pod floating in space, he waits for the unresponsive HAL to open the gate; in the pod arms he holds his dead friend who has been sacrificed for the mission. In this strange revision of the *Pietà*, the Madonna—the ultimate Christian image of asexual childbirth, maternal narcissism and mourning—is mapped onto the relationship of two men whose physical contact is mediated by a machine or, one could say, a scientific discourse of machines. For Bowman, technology is the highly sublimated mode of realizing Schreber's phantasy of virgin motherhood, and the villain HAL is the symptomatic focus for his paranoid defence against the challenge of this phantasy to his masculine autonomy.

The most homoerotic aspect of the film, of course, is Bowman's forced entry into the ship and into HAL himself. Bowman explodes into the flowing red tunnel of the emergency entrance, much to HAL's distress. He stalks through the ship, his heavy breathing

electrically amplified by life support. HAL responds in an ambiguous voice. His words suggest the fear and panic of rape, and yet his calm 'user-friendly' tone suggests a disturbing sensuality, reinforcing the eroticism of an otherwise violent act. 'Dave Stop Stop, will you Stop, Dave. Will you stop, Dave. Stop, Dave I'm afraid I'm afraid, Dave Dave. My mind is going. I can feel it. I can feel it My mind is going, There is no question about it I can feel it I can feel it I can feel it. I'm afraid' In the glowing red room of HAL's sanctum sanctorum, Dave Bowman slowly dislodges HAL's consciousness with a screwdriver, while the groggy computer recalls his creation in Urbana, Illinois, and sings a lullaby of sorts, a love song addressed ironically to Bowman 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do. I'm half crazy all for the love of you. It won't be a stylish marriage. I can't afford a carriage. But you'd look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two.' HAL's love song to the man who is literally (un)screwing him juxtaposes love with rape and murder, suggesting the erotic ambivalence at the heart of Bowman's violence. In attacking and dismantling HAL, Bowman is battling with the return of his own repressed narcissism; he is silencing a voice at once alienated from him and yet a part of him, most strange and yet most familiar, the electric voice of a machine and yet strangely the voice of his child or his lover. HAL is Bowman's symptom, the technological voice of his unconscious. HAL's voice is inscrutable and mysterious, despite his presumptions to perfect rationalism. No empirical analysis can reveal the nature of HAL's capacity for error, which challenges Bowman's belief in the computer and in himself as pure and infallible consciousness. HAL returns to Bowman the message of his own unconsciousness, the limits of his own knowledge. Bowman's assault on HAL is not only a murder, but also a revelation of sorts. HAL's unconscious, the unknown secret that motivates the whole mission, is depicted as a videotape that accidentally reveals itself to Bowman once he has deactivated HAL. The videotape tells us of the monolith and the real mission of the *Discovery* – the quest to understand the monolith's strange message. But the videotape itself is mysterious. It mentions the monolith, but cannot explain its meaning. Like the unconscious, the videotape is a secret that remains mysterious even in its revelation. The official in the videotape speaks, but can tell us nothing. Bowman's only discovery is a paranoid one, the realization that he has been the victim of a superior and even hostile knowledge.

Ironically, Bowman then changes places with HAL in what amounts to an identification with his symptom. HAL is reduced to his somatic functions, while Bowman takes control of the ship. Bowman leaves behind his dependent role as hired hand for HAL, but he only achieves mastery through a sadistic act that recalls HAL's own behaviour toward Poole. His identification with HAL is

further underscored when he is sucked through Jupiter space, his wide open eye, like HAL's eye, filling the screen. His mastery is still qualified by his passivity. Bowman ends up in a surreal room – Regency, Louis Quinze, Louis Seize, Miami hotel room. It depends on which critic you read – a room of the mind, a collapse of the distinction between inner and outer space. It is also a collapse of time and identity, as Bowman sees himself ageing in a mirror and encounters himself, narcissistically, in different rooms at different stages in his life. The room is also one of postmodern nostalgia for the Enlightenment, decorated in neo-neo-classical taste with ideal spaces of white light interrupted by European paintings that predate 2001 by a few centuries. This room glows with an idealizing white light. The body is vanishing, decaying, sublimated to death. The bathroom is so neat – is it ever used? As Theodor Adorno writes 'Imprisoned in itself, the subject holds its breath, as though it were not permitted to touch anything unlike itself'¹⁸ Bowman's room is the very image of that 'windowless monad' of objectless inwardness that Adorno finds in the mirror of modernist literature, not to mention in 'capitalism's highly polished, glittering late phase'¹⁹ But Bowman's pensive and methodical dinner is interrupted by an error, an error like HAL's error, a wine glass broken by a miscalculated move of his body. His error recalls him to the very existence of that body, the body that still stubbornly resists erasure by the intellect.

Kubrick celebrates the rationalist utopia of man's transcendent rebirth from his own head, but only after he has all but unplugged HAL, the persecuting voice of the narcissism inherent in man's love for his own machinery. *2001* follows a familiar paranoid narrative in which the racial, sexual, or ideological purity of the hero is threatened by his own alterity, and a plot is generated through the creation of an enemy, a symptom in fact – in this case HAL, who embodies this alterity and who must be destroyed. The plot is familiar to us not only from Gothic literature and horror films, but also from the Frankfurt School's critique of the authoritarian personality and Freud's discussion of repressed homosexuality with respect to fascism and paranoia. But, as Freud and Adorno knew, paranoid defence, the symbolic murder of the symptom, does not necessarily resolve the internal conflict, but may just cloak it and perpetuate it. Bowman's failure to answer the call of the unconscious has not made the phone stop ringing. The murder of HAL is a murder in effigy, an effort at mystification that can only mask – but not eradicate – the techno-narcissism inherent in Bowman's romantic resurrection and rebirth as the Star Child.

The concluding frames of the film, depicting the ideal figure of the Star Child happily isolated in space, may be seen as Kubrick's final attempt to ensure this mystification. The Star Child is put forward as Bowman's final triumph over HAL. It may be seen as the final triumph over the disruptive desire that the film has been articulating

¹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (1967), trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) p. 262

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 256

and struggling with all along Bowman has achieved the ultimate sublimation of the phantasy of male childbirth or procreation between men. Through science and technology he has given birth to himself out of his own head. He has presumably re-engendered himself as a self-sufficient and autonomous being that can do without woman, the body, and nature. The question is, does Kubrick succeed in his technological utopianism? Are his critics justified in reading the film as misogynistic or homophobic? As many have noted, HAL is the most human presence in the film, and his silencing is one of the most disturbing scenes in all of Kubrick's work. At one point, HAL's lens and Kubrick's lens are one and the same – I seem to be looking through HAL's eyes, as he tries to lip-read Bowman and Poole. Any identification with HAL I might feel would tend to undermine my paranoid reaction against him; and yet my identification and horror put me also in the place of Dave Bowman, who experiences HAL as the uncanny, that which is at once most familiar and most strange. Is Bowman a traditional SF hero, or is he the target of Kubrick's irony? Is *2001* the satirical Kubrick of *Dr Strangelove*, or is it Kubrick, the space-age mythmaker, submitting the technological age to a familiar paranoid narrative of itself? The question is a difficult one. Despite the triumphant tone of the final frames, Kubrick's attempt at narrative closure remains troubling and ambiguous.

This ambiguity at the end of *2001* raises for me the possibility of a radical reworking of traditional paranoid narratives in film, perhaps even through the sort of satire at which Kubrick is adept. Although much remains to be said about filmic horror and paranoid defence, I want to make a sudden leap to Almodóvar because I think it is extremely important – especially for queer theory – to address the possibility of the paranoid pleasure towards which Kubrick seems to gesture. *Law of Desire* is, in my view, the finest example of the pleasurable failure of paranoid defence in film. My starting point is again Freud's reading of Schreber's memoirs. Having expressed his horror – and thinly disguised pleasure – at the possibility of his homosexuality (his fear, for example, of being tossed to the asylum attendants for their sexual enjoyment), Schreber treats us to an account of his submission to the will of God. He describes his bodily transformation into a woman, complete with female genitalia and feminine nerves of voluptuousness. He comes to the defence of his pleasure, amid what is otherwise a distressing account of his 'nervous illness': 'Since then I have wholeheartedly inscribed the cultivation of femininity on my banner, and I will continue to do so as far as consideration of my environment allows, whatever other people who are ignorant of the supernatural reasons may think of me.'²⁰ Such queer pride! Is it possible to wave such a 'banner' in the cinema? Schreber is declaring his separate peace somewhere in that

²⁰ Daniel Paul Schreber *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), trans. Ida Macalpine and Richard A. Hunter (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 149.

21 Freud 'Psychoanalytic notes on an autobiographical account' p. 47

22 Paul Julian Smith *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film 1960–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1992), p. 199

battle zone between societal prohibition and insistent, subversive desire. Schreber attempts to make peace with the prohibition against homosexuality by saying that he is an agent of God and really a woman after all. What Freud finds in Schreber, however, is a 'feminine (that is, passive homosexual) wishful phantasy'.²¹ Schreber's desire to submit to a man (or a masculine deity) as a woman is an attempt to answer the disruptive call of repressed homosexual desire as spoken through the psychic mechanism of paranoid hallucination. His paranoia, according to Freud, finds its aetiology in a homosexual fixation on his father or his brother, not to mention the transference of this libidinal cathexis onto his doctor, Flechsig.

If it is conceivable to make a film in which the return call of repressed desire is answered rather than brutally disconnected, then *Law of Desire* is that film. As Paul Julian Smith has noted, 'by placing itself on the side of the "woman" (on the side of love, loss, and timelessness) Almodóvar's cinema of gay male desire "crosses the line" between male and female narrative, makes possible a certain pleasure in the place gendered as female, a pleasure which should not be dismissed as vicarious'.²² Smith's comment recalls Kubrick's *Playboy* interview in its dissatisfaction with the limits of gender. The male exploration of pleasures encoded as feminine is not, in Almodóvar, an appropriation of some essentially female position, but is rather a symptom of the failure of traditional structures of masculinity to account for all the vicissitudes of desire in men. Furthermore, like Kubrick, Almodóvar eroticizes technology and the disembodied voice as part of his effort to articulate the play of desire. Unlike *2001*, however, *Law of Desire* is a film about queer people that needs to be talked about a great deal more. With its play of language and use of camp, Almodóvar's film challenges familiar distinctions between high art and popular culture, melodrama and comedy, male and female, straight and gay, gay and lesbian, sexual identity and sexual anarchy, making it one of the few films to engage queer themes with a genuinely postmodern sensibility (Derek Jarman and Ulrike Ottinger spring most quickly to my mind). The reviews of *Law of Desire*, however, were tepid, both in Spain and abroad. Almodóvar's films have always been attacked for their preoccupation with taboo sexuality – gay sex, transsexualism, sadomasochism, masturbation, and so on. He is the most popular director Spain has ever produced and has become something of a cult figure, especially among gay audiences, however, a more general journalistic prudery still prevails when he is reviewed. Almodóvar's camp sensibility has been widely misunderstood, perhaps because it is so firmly rooted in his sexual politics: 'You cannot take camp out of its original context if you feel like an intellectual using this . . . element of *theirs*. To use it outside, you have to celebrate it, to make an orgy of camp

²³ Almodóvar, quoted in Marcia Pally, 'Camp Pedro', *Film Comment*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1988), p. 18.

Law of Desire (courtesy of BFI
stills archive and Metro
Pictures)

Anyway, it's a sensibility. Either you have it or you don't.²³ Among North American critics, only Pauline Kael, a camp icon in her own right, has been consistently enthusiastic in the Almodóvar cause, writing perceptive *New Yorker* reviews that apparently made news in Spain.



Much like *2001*, *Law of Desire* incites sexual panic, if the reviews are any clue to the typical audience response. Reading through the North American reviews of *Law of Desire* and *Matador* (1986) – Almodóvar's first films to find an audience in the USA – I find that some of the comments are simply beyond me: 'lacks in depth', 'boneheaded', 'quite the hooiest trash', and 'romantic idealism that has connections with fascism'. Other comments engage the language of pathology, a commonplace method of abusing anything queer: 'schizoid', 'disorderly', 'acting out', 'a textbook-worthy collection of case histories' – one critic even observed that the director 'could probably save all this stuff for his shrink'.²⁴ But what is to be made of a gay critic from New York who says, presumably in reference to AIDS, 'In this day and age it's scandalous for Almodóvar to make a film that promotes homosexuality'?²⁵ Almodóvar himself, apparently afraid of losing his heterosexual market, has said that *Law of Desire* is the exact opposite of films aimed at a 'gay public' and that, after a while, 'you forget that the triangle of lovers is all men'.²⁶ Although this judgement has been frequently reiterated by a number of people, neither my experience of the film nor my experience of its reviews bears it out; furthermore, I am at a loss to understand why one would want to forget that the triangle of lovers is all men. As with *2001*, the film reviews raise the question of queerness, but at the same time control all the answers in what amounts to an act of defence.

Ironically, *Law of Desire* is itself concerned with desire, control,

²⁴ See Janet Mastin, 'Spanish law of desire', *The New York Times*, 27 March 1987, p. C15; David Edelstein, 'Woolly bully', *The Village Voice*, 7 April 1987, p. 54; Stanley Kauffman, 'Strong reactions', *The New Republic*, vol. 198, no. 28 (1988), p. 128; Marsha Kinder, 'Pleasure and the new Spanish mentality', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 1 (1987), pp. 33–44.

²⁵ Quoted in Enrique Fernández, 'Desire under the palms', *The Village Voice*, 17 March 1987, pp. 62, 64.

²⁶ Quoted in Enrique Fernández, 'The lawyer of desire', *The Village Voice*, 7 April 1987, p. 50.

and defence with respect to language. Like Lacan's seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', Almodóvar's film is about letters waylaid en route to their destination. Machine-made texts abound, including film scripts, dramatic scripts, phone messages, phone calls, a television interview, gramophone records, and photographs. Almodóvar delights in the fetishization of the signifier, its deviation from its supposed origin in human speech into a tactile life of its own as recorded language. Furthermore, this fetish object, this detachable phallus, is ceaselessly in transit, ceaselessly defying control or possession or even stable interpretation. Consider Pablo's love letters to himself and to Juan, already the bearer of narcissistic and homoerotic pleasure, but then transformed when read aloud by Juan or by Juan and Pablo at the same time, read aloud by Ada (the young girl who loves Pablo), and read aloud by Antonio and by the detective – read aloud in each case by a voice over, a voice that is itself disembodied, free floating. The recorded voice or image at play is a central theme throughout Almodóvar's work: mock television commercials, pornographic videos, films within films, telephones, message machines, lip synching, dubbing, and so on.

In *Law of Desire*, Pablo seems to authorize his own desire, to distance it and control it, always through the machinery of the spoken voice, through the telephone, the television, and the scripts he writes on his typewriter. However, in the very play of his reified words, in the generation of sexual meanings and sexual consequences beyond his conscious intention in contexts beyond his conscious comprehension, his own message returns to haunt him in disguise. The law of desire follows closely upon the law of the signifier, ever disseminating, always in some sense returning, in uncanny scenes that exceed the human faculty of control or repression. Technology and the technified voice become the mechanisms of paranoia. As with the voice of HAL in *2001*, what is thought to be Pablo's own voice and his own desire, alienated through machinery in his effort at control, returns as the voice and the desire of the Other, exceeding control, exceeding the illusion of possession, and always already at play.

The opening scene is extraordinary. In fact, it has already begun to assume an iconic position in discussions of queer specularity.²⁷ A nameless young man enters a bedroom or, at any rate, a room with a bed; he is ordered by a male voice over to undress, and he obeys. Nameless, but I could call him Schreber. This man is not so very different from Schreber, insofar as his pleasure and fear and uncertainty seem to hinge upon his obedience to a mysterious voice. There is a cut, and I see the young man again, but then I realize it is his mirror image. At the command of the voice, he goes to a full-length mirror in his briefs and, like a new Narcissus, he kisses his image, and rubs his crotch against the glass; he removes his briefs, runs his fingers over his body, turns face down on the bed and

²⁷ See for example Smith *Laws of Desire* pp. 188–90; also Earl Jackson Jr., 'Graphic specularity: pornography, Almodóvar and the gay male subject of cinema', Cecilia Moore and Valerie Wayne (eds), *Transformations: Gender in Film and Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), pp. 4–8.

(apparently against his better judgment) demands to be fucked. Then, in an alienating cut, Almodóvar presents us to the speaker of the voice, an older man who at first I think is the director. And so I think I am watching a film being shot and a director giving orders from a script – or is he just reading it? Another man is with him, and I gather he is reiterating the young man's words for the soundtrack or perhaps even speaking in his place, I am not sure. In fact, I am unsure whether they are interacting with the young man at all, or just editing and dubbing a film in which he appears, that is, they may be speaking his words in his absence, indeed, in the absence of the entire profilmic scene. Have I seen yet the character who speaks the mysterious voice in the script I see before me? The voice and I are both positioned behind the young man, and we both focus on his buttocks, invisibly penetrated, framed for emphasis, as he brings himself to orgasm with his hand. Then he is paid – who is this man who pays, this arm with money on the screen? The young man is a paid actor, but no, the camera is still on. His being paid is part of his role as an actor and, in fact, the two other men might also be actors. The final frame of this sequence becomes the final frame of the film as it is shown on a theatre screen in the next sequence, linking what I have just seen to the rest of the film. I learn that Pablo is the director and writer of the film; and as for the three (or is it four?) men I have been watching, all of whom might be characters in his film, two of whom might not be, none of them are seen again.

I am disoriented from the start, unsure of what I am hearing and looking at, unsure where the frame of the film within the film is supposed to end. Is this a house, a hotel, a set? Is the young man a friend, a hustler, a prisoner, an actor, perhaps all of these? Where is the voice speaking from – inside the room, outside the room, over the speaker of a telephone? Who is the voice – a private person, the writer, the director, an editor, another actor? Who do I identify with – the voice, the camera, the young man taking orders? Beyond the sheer virtuosity and complexity of this scene, there is the paranoid sensation it excites in the spectator, whose position of superior knowledge is by no means assured. I could envy Schreber, who could at least claim a degree of certainty about things, however delusional. Finally, I learn that the writer and director of this film within a film is absent from the opening scene; in a sense, it is another disembodied voice or, rather, a voice reified by a screenplay and re-embodied, performed by the voice of another in the absence of the author and perhaps even in the absence of the actor who appears to be speaking – then reified in turn by the recording medium of film and re-contextualized as my own experience as viewer (or was it Tina's experience, as she sits in the audience?). The confusion of contexts and identities generates a crisis of interpretation. I have no certainty about what I am looking at or

what I am hearing or who has control over my gaze, all I know is that I am experiencing it and I like it. Despite the alienating effects, the suture is powerful: that is, despite my confusion, you could not separate me from the screen with a spatula. Moreover, whether one is a man or a woman or a little of both, it is virtually impossible to watch this scene, I think, without feeling drawn into it as a participant, implicated in its queer fantasy, positioned as a queer man – and this too can generate a paranoid, essentially homophobic, feeling of panic

Almodóvar admitted in an interview that this scene was too disturbingly erotic even for him, which is why he made the cut away from the masturbating man to the two men speaking from a script.²⁸ The scene generates too much memory, too much pleasure, and too much guilt, especially for a director who is trying to forget Franco and his own Catholic education. But he cuts away from the original scene, dare we call it the primal scene, of the masturbating man, towards – what? Towards an editor who might be the writer or a director, eventually towards the director Pablo, then towards the director Pedro and Almodóvar's own disembodied voice as it sings in the background at a disco in the following scene. In true paranoid fashion, a cutting away from the scene of desire is at the same time a cutting towards it, an alienating effect that raises the question of the desire of the one who writes or directs, even the one who watches in the audience.

Paranoia is put in play from the start, from the moment I find myself in the same room with a man being ordered to undress by a voice that sounds as if it comes from inside our own heads. Schreber, of course, could probably have sympathized: commanded, overwhelmed, even insulted by strange 'voices', he feels obliged to obey in spite of himself. Like the young man, whose penis is the only part of his body that remains hidden from the camera, the existence of Schreber's penis is often in question. Sometimes he is sure he has female genitalia, and the idea occurs to him 'that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse'.²⁹ Schreber performs his desire, his erotic transformation, before a mirror, though I do not recall that he ever actually kisses the mirror. *Law of Desire* has a Schreberian queerness throughout. The transformation from a man into a woman is a phantasy for Schreber, but a surgical reality for Almodóvar's Tina, who is now Pablo's sister but was once his brother. As in the Schreber case, the voice that persuaded Tina to change her sex was that of her father, who could not be trusted, who abused her and who is, as one might expect, absent from the film.

Paranoia is confirmed by the central love triangle of the film, the obsessive love of Antonio for Pablo and Pablo for Juan. Antonio becomes the preying stranger whose words are nevertheless uncanny, familiar to Pablo because they are sometimes his own, and

²⁸ Vito Russo, *Man of La Mancha*, *Film Comment*, vol. 24, no. 6 (1988), pp. 15–16.

²⁹ Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, p. 63.

for Juan, Antonio is also the uncanny stranger who has taken his place with Pablo and yet, at the same time, has taken Pablo's place, wearing a shirt in the same pattern as Pablo's favourite shirt and attempting to seduce Juan. As in the Schreber case, Pablo is unwittingly the author of his own paranoid predicament, which is to say he wrote it in his own absence. Antonio's desire is authorized by Pablo insofar as Antonio is attempting to embody the desired object that Pablo describes through his film and through a television interview. This is perhaps the ideal object Pablo experiences in his love for Juan but does not find in Juan himself, the ideal object that is consciously suppressed (by his split with Juan, his attempt to 'get over it') and displaced onto film and television. After the film, Antonio jerks off in the men's room of the cinema, repeating the words he attributes to the actor and to the object of Pablo's desire ('Fuck me! Fuck me!'), in effect taking the place of the actor in the film. Later, still unknown to Pablo, Antonio watches the television interview as though he were taking notes. Although he professes heterosexuality and apparently has had no sexual experiences with men, he goes home with Pablo and immediately attempts to live the picture of the desired man that Pablo has unwittingly suggested to him. Antonio fixes things around the house, he dotes on Pablo, he learns to be fucked. He even repeats lines from Pablo's interview – 'I know that line', Pablo remarks, with an unpleasant feeling of *déjà vu*. Pablo experiences the return of his signifier in the voice of this stranger, this unwanted lover: in this way, he is dogged by the very object of his repressed desire, which he comes to understand as his enemy.

In Pablo, I find a classic vacillation between desire and its foreclosure. Antonio, not to mention all the machinery and technology of the human voice in this film, functions in paranoid fashion as the symptom that continually returns Pablo to the scene of desire. Antonio, who is himself one of Pablo's dramatic creations, is the symptom by which Pablo remains in play as a subject of desire. The Lacanian theorist, Slavoj Žižek, makes this function of the symptom especially clear:

the symptom is the way we – the subjects – 'avoid madness', the way we 'choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe)' through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world. . . . This, then, is a symptom – a particular, 'pathological', signifying formation, a binding of enjoyment, an inert stain resisting communication and interpretation, a stain which cannot be included in the circuit of discourse, of social bond network, but is at the same time a positive condition of it.³⁰

³⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 75.

31 Jean Cocteau *The Human Voice*
(1930), trans. Carl Wildman
(London: Vision Press 1951)
p. 31

This foreclosure or 'psychotic autism' is best represented in the film by Pablo's bout with amnesia, an amnesia he does not want to part with. This amnesia is a failure to remember who he is and whom he loves, and it is concomitant with Pablo's recognition of the role he has played in Antonio's murder of the object of desire, Juan. Pablo is forever struggling towards the foreclosure of desire, opting out of its circuit, retreating into an increasingly narcissistic enclosure in his apartment, safe from the object (Juan) and the symptom (Antonio), whom he keeps at a distance by means of the telephone and the message machine. Pablo understands the telephone's power of erotic control. So did Cocteau, whose telephone play, *The Human Voice*, he stages with Tina. In Cocteau's play, the heroine moans in despair, 'If you didn't love me but were clever, the telephone would become a terrifying weapon, noiseless and leaving no trace' 31

But it is precisely love and desire that render the telephone unstable as a prosthetic device of erotic control. Through the telephone and message machine, the television interview, the typewriter on which he writes his plays and his letters, Pablo keeps Juan and Antonio paradoxically under control and painfully in touch. He leaves the possibility of desire open. Note that Tina has returned to Pablo his typewriter in the same scene in which his amnesia disappears. Pablo's recorded voice shares the place of Antonio as symptom. Antonio is Pablo's only bridge to desire, and yet is also inimical to desire. Antonio insists upon himself as an object of desire, and he recalls Pablo to his feelings for Juan. But at the same time he is a suicide and the murderer of the object Juan. He is the embodiment of Pablo's repressed desire for Juan, and also the agent of Pablo's repressed aggression toward Juan.

Antonio as symptom, though not 'included in the circuit of discourse', is nevertheless a 'positive condition of it', to use Žižek's words. He is a threat, and yet he continually returns Pablo to – what? Desire. The Law of Desire, as represented through Juan, its archetypal object, and Tina, its archetypal subject. Tina is Almodóvar's most extraordinary creation in this respect. Gay man, straight woman, lesbian, transsexual, Tina is virtually an allegorical figure for Almodóvar's conception of desire in the film. Hers is the voice of unrequited love or, more precisely, the melancholic voice of desire: productive, transformative, unsatisfiable, always languishing in the real absence but phantasmatic presence of the object, always predicated on an essential gap between the self and the beloved. Her life is a dramatization of Lacan's dictum that the sexual relation does not exist. Erotic couplings in this film always fail, always miss the point. The object is always vanishing. Desire is Tina's lament for her lover, Ada's mother Ada, and her lament as Cocteau's telephone heroine in *The Human Voice*. Desire is Tina's prayer for Morocco, where her father abandoned her for another woman, and it is also her masochistic and weepy song of Christian adoration to

the Virgin in the chapel where she used to jerk off and where her spiritual father also abandoned her. Desire is Tina's body, her erotic plenitude determined ironically by her many losses, so tormented that she begs to be hosed down in the street. Desire is also the message of Jacques Brel's '*Ne me quitte pas*', don't leave me, a sentimental song sung in a suitably gender-bending voice on Pablo's stereo. And desire is also Laura P. – Pablo's latest dramatic creation based on Tina – a woman who mutilates her own body to excite the tenderness of her beloved. For Almodóvar, desire is an interminable demand, profoundly melancholic and queerly feminine.



Law of Desire
(courtesy of BFI stills archive
and Metro Pictures)

The Jacques Brel song, the telephone play, Antonio's seduction of Tina, all bring Pablo into an identification with the melancholic economy of desire that Tina represents. As with Schreber, the pleasure, essentially incestuous here, finds Pablo in the feminine position, the position of Tina, the brother he no doubt loved, the sister he maybe still loves (note especially the scenes where they seem strangely like mother and father to the girl Ada). His identification with Tina mirrors Tina's own transsexual transformation, the transformation of gay man into queer woman. Pablo is in the position of the gay man turned queer woman at the sound of his own estranged voice played back to him, through letters from Juan, through Antonio – through the 'human voice' of Tina, moaning with rejection.

In rewriting Cocteau's telephone play, Pablo is in effect speaking aloud the signifier he ascribes to Tina, Tina's memory, Tina's mourning for her love for Ada's mother Ada. But in the quarrel over the old photographs from their childhoods, Pablo recognizes that Tina's past is to some extent his own; through the play he writes, they also come to share a present – of rejection, of fame, of artistry, even of cocaine. They share the spirit of Tina's song to the

Virgin, 'singing, weeping, and pain ... attend to my lament' *The Human Voice* is both Tina's and Pablo's voice at once and, ironically, it is a voice which neither Juan nor Antonio ever hear. But it is also through Pablo's authorial voice that this *Voice* too is controlled, projected onto Tina, whose place nevertheless he shares. Pablo's identification with Tina is further celebrated and distanced through his next artistic project(ion), the creation of the character Laura P, once again based on Tina's past. This would seem to be another attempt at erotic control, another effort by Pablo to experience his own desire vicariously through projection onto Tina. But Tina resents this aspect of control, his appropriation of her failures, and his use of her voice as a speaking 'machine' (her word) on stage. She insists upon the value of her own melancholic desire, and she refuses her role as Pablo's symptom. To complicate matters, the imaginary Laura P takes on a life of her own: she is a character in a play, but Pablo also uses her name to write letters to the closeted Antonio, whose mother spies on him. Laura P. becomes herself another symptom, Tina or no Tina. In the imaginations of Antonio's mother and the police, she becomes a woman whom Antonio and Pablo are fighting over. At one point, the police suspect Tina of posing as Laura P. and murdering Juan, in other words, the original is accused of posing as the copy. Laura P. is the imaginary mode by which Pablo speaks as Tina, while still reserving the distance of the creative artist. But in his playfulness with this imaginary identity, he becomes involved in a farcical plot whose violent consequences exceed his control. The character of Laura P is another instance in which Pablo's own voice returns to him in paranoid fashion as the voice of the Other.

The scene from *The Human Voice* as staged by Pablo is itself another extraordinary moment in the film. Pablo has invested Cocteau's pathetic heroine with Tina's axe-wielding eroticism and her memories of her former lover, Ada's mother Ada, and he has included the girl herself in a communion dress, wheeling slowly across the stage on a kind of handcar, lip-synching '*Ne me quitte pas*'. As in the opening scene, I am unsure what is happening at first, since the set is a reproduction of Tina's apartment and the scene a representation of her life. At first, I am unsure whether this is a stylish move on Almodóvar's part or a play within the film. The play of the dramatic text exceeds even Pablo's authorial control when Ada's mother Ada appears, as though summoned by the act of calling her on the stage telephone. Again, the technified voice has an uncanny capacity to upset the opposition of intimacy to distance, presence to absence. While Tina is presumably moaning to her lover Ada Mama over the phone, Ada Mama appears offstage. Tina finds herself speaking a script into the phone, speaking out of script into the phone, speaking the script offstage to Ada Mama and speaking out of script offstage to Ada Mama.

A number of oppositions are upset here. When is Tina in character or out of character, since everything she says is her own words? When are her words her words, rather than Pablo's words or the words of the play? Where does the frame of the play end, does it include Ada Mama? And what about when Tina leaps toward the wings? To what extent is the girl Ada a part of Tina's scene? To what extent is Ada's voice her own, since (after an emotional scene with her mother in the dressing room) her voice overlaps with the voice of the recording? To what extent is Tina actually Carmen Maura, the actress who plays her? Almodóvar has set up a clever mirroring effect that recalls the disorientation and doubling of the Narcissus at his mirror in the opening scene. With Maura as Tina, a woman plays a man who became a woman, and with the transsexual actress Bibi Andersson playing Ada Mama, a man who became a woman plays a woman. This mirror effect is further played out by Ada's mother Ada, by Antonio Banderas playing Antonio Benitez, by the director Pedro directing the director Pablo, and by the director Pedro appearing Hitchcock-style as a shop assistant in his own film. Clearly, it is more than conventional oppositions of gender and sexuality that are deconstructed in this film. That this deconstruction evolves through the effects of a telephone and a typescript is important: technology promotes the freedom and play of the signifier in transit, liberated from its conventional association with a human body or a human voice. This scene emphasizes the unpredictability and therefore the uncontrollability of the signifier and its resistance to myths of possession and origin. Human speech, conventionally presumed to be the origin of language and therefore truer to nature in western metaphysics, takes a Derridean turn through technology.

The film's ending, in which Antonio holds Tina hostage in the hope of a final hour of sex with Pablo, suggests a surrender of sorts: the power of the signifier to control desire finally accedes to the power of the signifier to unleash it. That an intersection of the camp and the queer should provide the vehicle for this sort of commentary on language is important since camp thrives on its being in excess of conventional narrative strategies and since queerness, by definition, wreaks havoc on conventional notions of sexuality. However unlikely, Pablo, finally impressed by Antonio's love and self-sacrifice, submits to him – while in the background another gramophone record is playing, los Panchos' *'Lo dudo'*, a song ironically about love and doubt. This seduction is accompanied by the subtle tickling noise of Pablo's typewriter, as though they are being written by an invisible author even as they speak; and of course they are. Pablo has authorized the desire of the man who persecutes him, and in his submission to his persecutor, his own words authorize his destiny, despite his best efforts to the contrary. A wonderfully paranoid delusion becomes a paranoid truth: the

32 As Smith points out (p. 198) this visual allusion to the *Pieta* is explicit in Almodóvar's script

33 This violence to the signifier is apparent from the opening credits of the film, in which the names of actors, writer-director and so on are typewritten on white paper that has apparently been crumpled and thrown away. To underscore the sexiness of the metaphor, Almodóvar spotlights the names as though with a flashlight, giving the audience a voyeuristic sensation that they are playing detective and secretly peering through someone else's literary failures in the dark.

writer is written by his own typewriter. Put in Lacanian terms, the writer is in the possession of his typewriter (admirable ambiguity of language). The two men have sex, and the tick of the typewriter becomes the tick of an ornament on, ironically, a rear-view mirror and the grind of a gyrating light atop a police car. This tick, this script, is wandering, volatile, out of control, perhaps fatally so, as Antonio spreads a shroud-like sheet over the recumbent Pablo and shoots himself. The script veers with camp disrespect through many of the standard means of representing queer desire in film – as vampirism (the biting imagery is especially suggestive), as necrophilia, as narcissism, as at once murderous and suicidal. At one point the two lovers even pose as that familiar icon, the *Pietà*, as Pablo (having already undergone a resurrection or two) keels and embraces the dead Antonio in his arms; but even this image is undercut by Ada's over-the-top May Cross as it catches fire in the background.³² The final scene is anything but neatly moralistic. The film ends in a typical Almodóvarian violence to the signifier and its machines: Pablo tosses his typewriter out the window in a last vain attempt to resist the tangles of desire and narrative. In a comic move that is pure Almodóvar, language asserts its playful potency; however unlikely, the typewriter violently explodes into flames as it lands in a rubbish bin.³³

In this final scene, Almodóvar parts with a tradition of paranoid defence. In *2001*, the sexual conflicts raised by the paranoid plot with HAL are virtually upstaged by the silencing of HAL and the triumphant and utopian figure of the Star Child. Bowman appears to have transcended the desire that persecutes him. Pablo, however, submits to the paranoid return of his own signifier, his own desire, closing in on him after a wide circuit through technology and Antonio, closing in on him in a wide arc like the wide arc of the rays of God as they shoot down from the sky into Schreber's head. It is, in Almodóvar's words, an 'orgy of camp'. *Law of Desire* embraces the pleasure, even the violence, engendered by its own paranoia. At the same time, the film manages to bypass the homophobia of the traditional paranoid plot by rendering desire itself queer and taking the lives of openly queer people as its focus. Furthermore, Almodóvar makes no attempt at triumphant closure, as Kubrick seems to do in *2001*. He does not simply kill the persecutor and leave the hero in command of the sexual field. Unlike the dismantling of HAL and the appearance of the Star Child, the suicide of Antonio is not homophobic and it is not an effort at neatly resolving the questions about desire that the film raises. Despite Pablo's submission and Antonio's suicide, desire remains in play, as does the repeated refrain of the song on the gramophone, '*Lo dudo, lo dudo, lo dudo*', as the credits roll. Pablo is, if anything, overwhelmed by the sort of obsessive and melancholic love he once repressed. The final shot is of a burning

building; the typewriter and the May Cross have set the screen ablaze, and men scale the wall on rescue ladders. I am left at the end of *Law of Desire* as I am left at the end of Schreber's memoirs uncertain of the hero's command of the sexual field. I am filled with doubt, like the singer of '*Lo dudo*' I doubt the success of the treatment of the closure of the narrative. I do not believe that Schreber is free of the asylum once and for all, though the authorities let him out, and I do not believe that Pablo will ever quite liberate himself from the complications of desire, from that burning building of sorts, in which the film leaves him. And above all, I am haunted and thrilled by this possibility in the film of a queer voice interminably at play.

report

Public service broadcasting by
satellite in Europe: Eurikon and
Europa

RICHARD COLLINS

The Eurikon satellite television programme channel began in 1982 with five weeks of experimental transmissions on Eutelsat's (European Telecommunications Satellite Organization) OTS (Orbital Test Satellite). Following these experiments in 1982 a regular service, retitled Europa, began in October 1985 and continued transmissions until November the following year.

Eurikon originated in 1980 from proposals developed in the European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) New Developments Group. The New Developments Group urged a proactive role for public service broadcasting in the changing climate of West European television, and from this general policy reorientation developed a specific proposal for a satellite television channel.

Eurikon was actively supported by five national public broadcasters, Austria (ORF), Italy (RAI), the Netherlands (NOS), West Germany (ARD) and the United Kingdom (IBA). The five principal partners led by the UK's IBA, were each responsible in turn for programming and uplinking one of the five weeks of Eurikon programming (UK first, Italy second, Austria third, Netherlands fourth and finally Germany). They were supported by EBU members in Algeria (RTA), Finland (YLE), France (TDF), Greece (ERT), Ireland (RTE), Portugal (RTO), Spain (RTVE),

Switzerland (SSR), Tunisia (RTT) and Yugoslavia (JRT). The subordinate partners contributed some programming to Eurikon's five weeks of transmissions, to technical feasibility testing and to the assessment of audience responses. TDF vacated its transponder on the OTS so that Eurikon could be transmitted.

Europa was based at NOS' headquarters at Hilversum. It was supported by three of the Eurikon partners, NOS, RAI, ARD who were joined by RTE (Ireland) and RTP (Portugal).

Eurikon and Europa represent high points in cooperation by European public broadcasters and in attempts to use television as an instrument to foster European integration. The eventual lack of success of these channels testifies to the difficulties organizations, established for national purposes, experience when collaborating to achieve transnational goals, and to the strength of the 'cultural screens' which divide European television viewers. Cultural screens which have rendered both commercial and public European transnational satellite television initiatives less successful than their sponsors anticipated.¹

But in spite of the commitment of key European institutions to the Europa/Eurikon project and its important implications for public service, transnational broadcasting and development of a European audio-visual market and culture it seems to have had little influence on the development of policy and is little known to academic commentators.²

The broadcasters who launched Eurikon were supported by European political and broadcasting institutions; notably by the EBU, the Commission of the European Communities, the Council of Europe and the European Space Agency (ESA). Eurikon was thus the child of a convergence of interests of several public sector agencies. The EBU fostered it as an instrument of public sector and public service ideals in a commercial television market, the European Community as an agency for development of a European culture and consciousness; the European Space Agency as a client for the Direct Broadcast Satellite (the L-Sat, later named Olympus) which it had under development; and the participating public broadcasters had their own individual and different interests to serve, often ones which were *national* rather than international in character. (For example, both RAI and the IBA entered Eurikon for reasons of rivalry with domestic national broadcasters. RAI with Berlusconi and the IBA with the BBC. Indeed *national* rather than international interests determined not only the broadcasters which participated in Eurikon but also those which stayed out of it. Eurikon was a PAL service, SECAM broadcasters did not actively participate. However one of the most fascinating 'sub-texts' of the Eurikon experiment was the rivalry between the BBC and commercial television [notably the IBA] in Britain. In March 1982 the BBC was granted authority to transmit the UK's first two DBS

1 See R. Collins 'The language of advantage' in *Media, Culture and Society* vol 11 no 3 (1989) pp 351-71

2 But see R. Negrine and S. Papathanassopoulos *The Internationalization of Television* (London: Routledge 1990). S. Papathanassopoulos 'Towards European television: the case of Europa TV', *Media Information Australia*, no 56 (1990) pp 57-63. M. Wright 'Eurikon revisited', *EBU Review Programmes Administration Law*, vol 34 no 4 (1983) pp 31-8. The EBU/OTS compiled a report on the Eurikon experiment in 1982 in mimeo form *Eurikon DBS Pan European Broadcasting: A Summarised Report on the EBU/OTS Experiment 1982* (Geneva: EBU 1983).

channels. There is no question that the IBA fiercely resented its exclusion from development of the UK's DBS initiative and the IBA's involvement in Eurikon was seen by the IBA as a demonstration of its superior claims to prime responsibility for UK satellite television.)

Notwithstanding the importance of national rather than international (European) policy goals for some of the principal participants (and non-participants) in Eurikon the early- and mid-eighties was a period in which the European broadcasting policy discourse was dominated by a belief in twin linked determinisms: cultural and technological. The advent of a new communication technology – satellite television – would, it was believed, have a cataclysmic impact on terrestrial broadcasting, and the international character of its programming would have a similarly dramatic effect on the consciousness and character of viewers. The consequences of the anticipated 'wall-to-wall Dallas' of commercial satellite services were feared to be the erosion of European culture and identity but, *per contra*, the new technology could be used for the dissemination of European programmes (and therefore European culture) and a consequential production of a unified European identity. The flavour of such assumptions is captured in a statement of the Commission of the European Communities.

At the end of 1986 the whole European television scene will be transformed by the appearance of Europe's first direct television satellites . . . The choice is clear: either a strengthening of exchanges within Europe and a deepening of Community cooperation to promote the identity of our continent in all its diversity, or a surrender to powerful competitors and their cultural models, be it the Americans today, or the Japanese tomorrow.³

The first of the satellite television exchanges to which the Commission referred was the EBU initiative named Eurikon.⁴

From Eurikon to Euronews

Eurikon, and its successor Europa, were the first satellite channels to be provided by an international consortium of public service broadcasters. Other public satellite broadcasting consortia came later. German language public broadcasters (from Germany, Switzerland and Austria) collaborated on 3 Sat, and Francophone broadcasters (from France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Canada) in 1984 established TV 5. Most recently France and Germany have cooperated on the Franco-German channel known in France as La Sept and in Germany as ARTE (service began in May 1992). Single public broadcasters have also used satellite television as a means of distributing signals: the BBC with its World Service

³ Commission of the European Communities, *Television and the Audio-Visual Sector: Towards a European Policy* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 1986), p. 3.

⁴ Eurikon proved an unfortunate name: its final syllable having an obscene meaning in some European languages. Hence the name of Europa as the name of the broadcast service which succeeded it.

television, the ARD with Eins Plus and RAI with satellite relays of RAI Uno and RAI Due. However, satellite television in the early eighties was chiefly a commercial medium. Indeed a major motivation for the Eurikon and Europa partners was to ensure that public broadcasters were not preempted by private broadcasters.

From Eurikon (and Europa) several contemporary initiatives in satellite television can be directly traced: notably the collaboration between EBU members and News International on the Eurosport channel and the proposed EBU Euronews initiative. Like Eurikon, Euronews reflects public broadcasters' anxiety about commercial competition in the satellite field. For the advocates of Euronews the perceived success of CNN during the Gulf War of 1991 demanded a public sector response. But like Europa (the channel which grew out of Eurikon after the cessation of the 1982 Eurikon experiment) Euronews has no UK participant, though it has been successful (as Eurikon/Europa was not) in securing French participation. And, like Europa, Euronews (though anticipating participation from the public broadcasters of only five EC members together with six other EBU members including Egypt, Jordan and Yugoslavia) seeks funding, a reported £10m from the European Commission.⁵

⁵ See *Cable and Satellite Europe* March 1991 p. 8

Eurikon and the European Community

Eurikon's objectives were stated to be:

- to demonstrate and test five different possible schedule patterns for a European Television Service;

- to carry out research designed to assess possible audience reaction to such a service and its impact on existing national services;

- to experiment with and assess the costs and effectiveness of multichannel audio and teletext subtitling in different languages;

- to seek new ways of making programmes understandable for a multilingual audience;

- to assess the nature and cost of the central services including news and information services and other infrastructure that would be required for an operational European service,

- to identify and as far as possible resolve the technical, legal and financial problems that an operational service would present,

- to draw attention to the interest of European Public Service Broadcasters in co-operations in the field of Direct Broadcasting Satellites.⁶

⁶ EBU/OTS *Eurikon DBS Pan European Broadcasting* p. 22

⁷ As Neville Clarke, the Chairman of the EBU/OTS Operations Group which guided the Eurikon initiative and the UK's senior representative in Eurikon, put it in an interview with the author (31 January 1991)

It was to offer a 'slightly elitist' service to a transnational ABC1 audience. In fact Eurikon transmissions were not accessible to general audiences. Transmissions were scrambled and viewing confined to invited guests of the participating broadcasters and to

panels recruited for the purposes of audience research. Europa, the second stage of the experiment which transmitted from 1985 to 1986, was led by the NOS but lacked the participation of either the IBA or of ORF. Instead RTE (Ireland) and RTP (Portugal) joined the ARD, NOS and RAI in the year long transmissions of Europa. This service was built on the foundations laid by Eurikon but was partially financed by advertising, was news led and (like Eurikon) was programmed with what its members regarded as the best of their available programming.

At first Europa (from its launch in October 1985 to May 1986) was accessible only to subscribers to the limited number of Dutch cable networks (fifteen) which had sufficient channel capacity to distribute an additional television service. Viewers in Norway followed and by the time Europa ceased transmissions (in November 1986) about two million homes (in Finland, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal and Sweden) had access to its services via cable. Portuguese viewers received Europa via terrestrial rebroadcasting. Europa was transmitted with four sound tracks; Dutch, English, German and Portuguese.

In spite of attracting support from the Commission of the European Communities, keen both to promote a single European television market⁸ and European integration through a shared European culture mediated by television⁹, Europa ceased transmissions in November 1986 when NOS locked out Europa staff from its Hilversum facilities. The service 'collapsed after running through its initial funds more quickly than expected and attracting insufficient advertising'.¹⁰ Attempts to relaunch the service continued without success (led by the late Vittorio Boni, head of international affairs at RAI).¹¹

There is no doubt that the technical potentiality for transnational television now exists: whether that potentiality can be realized in Western Europe will depend on the development of an appropriate 'cultural form' for programming and scheduling. An analogy may illustrate the point. In the UK the technical potentiality for a national mass press (distribution by railway, rotary steam presses, pulp based paper and new inks) existed long before one was achieved. The mass press was conditional on the 'new journalism' invented by Newnes and Harmsworth in *Titbits* and *The Daily Mail*. So far a successful television transnational cultural form has not been invented. The Eurikon experience is particularly instructive in this respect. The responses of audience panels to Eurikon programming and schedules was largely negative¹² in spite of differences in the programming and scheduling in each of the five weeks of Eurikon transmissions (differences which reflected the different professional and programming assumptions of broadcasters from different West European societies). Moreover, whilst Eurikon viewer populations from different European states were united in

⁸ See *Television Without Frontiers* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 1984).

⁹ See *Realities and Tendencies in European Television: Perspectives and Options* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 1983).

¹⁰ *Financial Times*, 11 March 1987, p. 2.

¹¹ RAI has consistently been in the forefront of EBU satellite television initiatives. It took a major role in Eurikon and Europa and promises to do the same with Euronews which is headed by Ernesto Braun, a RAI employee who assisted Boni on the EBU initiatives of the 1980s.

¹² See H. de Bock, 'Eurikon considered: the Eurikonviewer's perspective', undated and unpublished NOS typescript, probably written in March 1983, Hilversum.

their lack of enthusiasm for Eurikon there were notable differences in their preferences and dislikes. Thus Eurikon provided little by way of a positive model for the future transnational European satellite television services.

Programmes and responses

Each of the five broadcasters (ARD, IBA, NOS, ORF, RAI from West Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Austria and Italy respectively) which contributed a week of programming to Eurikon's first five week period of experimental transmissions adopted a different pattern of scheduling. These differences not only reflected the consortium's desire to experiment and revise its schedules and programming in the light of experience, but also the different traditions of television scheduling and programming which obtained in each of the contributing countries. The Eurikon programme offer (of which about a third was produced specifically for Eurikon) can thus be read as an index of the broadcasting cultural habitus which obtains (or obtained) in different West European states. Differences were also marked in audience reception of Eurikon's programme offer and in response to satellite television generally.

Because Eurikon transmissions were broadcast scrambled there were no opportunities to use established methods of audience research or to base research on large and representative sample groups. However the participants in the experiment did conduct audience research and four partners (IBA in the UK, NOS in the Netherlands, RAI in Italy, and RTE in Ireland) used a common research design. ORF (Austria), RTP (Portugal), and SRG (Switzerland) also conducted research on viewer responses to Eurikon programming. The number of test persons used was Austria 15, Ireland 54, Italy 54, Netherlands 46, Portugal 82, UK 95, with Switzerland using a group of experts.

Research was directed to determining whether viewers perceived Eurikon to be more internationally orientated than the national channels, whether the Eurikon service was perceived to be complementary to established national services; what were perceived to be the strong and weak elements in Eurikon programming and scheduling, what viewers' assessment of Eurikon's handling of language were, and whether viewers would be interested in watching future Eurikon type services. The research method used by the IBA, NOS, RAI and RTE was summarized thus:

The research design involved about fifty test persons per country watching a sixty-minute tape compilation of four hours of a 'typical' Eurikon evening programme schedule. Test persons were

males and females, age 18–55, from upper as well as lower social classes and living in an urban setting. While watching the compilation, test persons had at their disposal a programme guide showing title and real time of each programme in the compilation. After watching this tape – containing mainly voice-over translations – as well as a ten-minute tape containing subtitled clips, test persons recorded their appreciation of Eurikon in questionnaires where also spontaneous reactions could be written in.¹³

¹³ EBU/OTS, *Eurikon DBS Pan European Broadcasting* p. 24

Most subjects ‘perceived Eurikon to contain a larger share of foreign programmes than their national television’ and its ‘international, European character was considered its most outstanding feature’.¹⁴ They agreed that Eurikon was ‘somewhat’ to ‘quite different’ from national television and that the differences centred on Eurikon’s international character and its emphasis on news and information services.¹⁵ Eurikon’s information programming was perceived as its most attractive element.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid* p. 25

The features of Eurikon’s programming which were perceived most positively, however, were also those which were viewed negatively. Although viewers commented favourably on the channel’s information programmes they also objected to the scheduling balance which favoured information over entertainment. Moreover there seems to have been audience ambivalence about Eurikon’s European dimension.

Test persons in a number of countries spontaneously mentioned Eurikon’s potential contribution to improving intra-European understanding, to strengthening European integration and to breaking down nationalistic barriers. However test persons in a number of countries warned against an ‘overdose’ of Pan-European affairs only, at the expense of important world news and regional or national current affairs.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Ibid* p. 26

Indeed viewers in Ireland and Austria (and to some extent in Portugal) were ‘critical about the lack of programmes from their own country’.¹⁷ And viewers everywhere voiced strong objections to the poor voice-over techniques and (except in the Netherlands where subtitling is much used on television) to the frequency of subtitling. Overall Eurikon was perceived to be

¹⁷ *Ibid*

An international, non-violent, serious and humourless channel. British test persons considered Eurikon most different from their national television; Dutch and Italian test persons least. In all three countries, however, was Eurikon’s test profile unfavourable with regard to audience attractiveness. The Irish test persons showed a somewhat more favourable profile. Thus Eurikon had the image of a predominantly serious, information channel and its characteristics profile indicated only a modest audience attractiveness compared with national television stations.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid* pp. 26–7

Eurikon audience research findings are congruent with other findings resulting from research on satellite television viewing in Europe. The 1987 survey of the European audience for satellite television by PETAR (Pan European Television Audience Research), a consortium sponsored by a variety of European television interests including Sky Channel and the IBA), suggests that there are highly differentiated preferences among European television viewers.¹⁹ That is, a schedule which maximises audiences in, say, the Netherlands will not do so in West Germany. Programmes in a single broadcaster's schedule rated highly in one particular national TV market are seldom rated highly in other European national markets. However a PETAR source (interviewed by the author in 1988) suggested that there are programme characteristics best avoided if successful transnational marketing of programming is to be achieved. European audiences are resistant to programmes (not screened in the native language of the viewer) which, *inter alia*, do not have synchronous sound and vision tracks (with voice over narration, for example) which have characters' mouths not visible when speaking, and which rely heavily on speech rather than imagery or action. Many of these unfortunate characteristics were evident in the programming screened on Eurikon.

Programme content and scheduling

Within an overall agreed programming policy which emphasized the potential of news and information programming as a distinctive competitive advantage for public broadcasters who were able to draw on cooperative EBU news gathering (as opposed to what were referred to by Eurikon as 'pirate' rival channels)²⁰, the Eurikon Operations Group planned for different schedule structures and contents for each of the five weeks of transmissions. Each evening was to consist of five to six hours of programming. The first, IBA, week anticipated a mix of programmes divided equally between information, education and sport on one hand, and drama, music and entertainment on the other. To fill this schedule the five coordinating organizations selected programmes from among their own proposals, and, as a second stage, to fill slots they had been unable to satisfactorily fill themselves, invited contributions from other participating organizations. News and current affairs slots were filled as close to transmission time as possible.

The second, RAI, week established a single theme for each of the evening schedules and solicited suitable contributions from other participants. RAI's successive evening themes were Cinema, Current Affairs, Serious Music, Comedy, Drama, Sport and Light Entertainment. Within each theme news, weather and promotional material for the following evening's schedule were inserted. The

¹⁹ For discussion of PETAR findings see R. Collins, *Satellite Television in Western Europe* (London: John Libbey, 1990).

²⁰ Few would now, after CNN and Sky News, believe that all the advantages are with public broadcasters in satellite television news.

RAI week utilized the EBU's conference and vision networking facilities to assemble a final schedule from other EBU members. The Operations Group report commented 'this was an effective if at times hair-raising method' ²¹

The third, Austrian, week followed a similar scheduling structure to that pioneered by RAI by juxtaposing programmes of different origins but of similar types. However, it associated its 'flagship' programmes, which were screened in full, with extracts from similar programmes made by other broadcasters. Both news and popular music programmes (Eurohitparade) were notable for their use of a 'compare and contrast' structure.

The fourth week, coordinated by the Dutch broadcasting authority NOS, was designed on classic public service lines and was conceived as a complement to the schedules which would be available to viewers from terrestrial services: for example, minority programming was scheduled in prime time, children's programming at 'adult' times, and the schedule was punctuated with public service announcements.

The final week, coordinated by the German ARD member-broadcaster Sud West Funk, aimed both to emulate the NOS initiative in complementary programming but also to establish a fixed and regular schedule so that viewers would easily be able to find their way around the schedule which was characterized by regular programme junctions and recurrent daily items. Thus the German week scheduled language teaching and programmes for migrant workers at prime time and a daily compilation on a specific theme assembled from contributions taken from different European broadcasters and three news programmes each evening.

Language

Clearly language is an important 'screen' which differentiates audiences and which must be penetrated if transnational television services are to enjoy success. Eurikon experimented with several different methods of linguistic re-presentation of its programming to viewers from different language communities. Indeed, Charles Barrant, a British television journalist who was the lynch pin of the Eurikon news service provided by the IBA and who became head of news at Europa, commented, 'Language was then and remains now the central issue of pan-European television'. ²²

Considerable differences in the treatment of natural language were evident in the different weeks, reflecting both different approaches to the fundamental problem of transnational broadcasting and an accumulation of expertise within the Eurikon experiment. The variations in treatment of language were all constrained by a common factor: cost. Translation requires skilled

22 C. Barrant, 'Europa Television – the transponder's eye view' in *EBU Review: Programmes, Administration Law* vol. 37 no. 2 (1986) p. 11.

and expensive labour, doubly so if it has to be done under pressing time constraints – as it does in television news production. Indeed Papathanassopoulos states that, ‘Europa had to employ a “small army” of translators and eventually close to half of its budget was spent on translations’ ²³

²³ S. Papathanassopoulos, ‘Towards European television: the case of Europa TV’, *Media Information Australia*, no. 56 (1990), p. 59

The handling of language during the Eurikon experiment was also constrained by technical factors; the encoding (scrambling) equipment used had only six sound channels. Five of these channels were used for Dutch, English, French, German, and Italian sound tracks, and facilities also existed for programmes to be subtitled either directly or using one or more pages of superimposed broadcast teletext.

For the first and second (UK and Italian) weeks of Eurikon live simultaneous interpretation using conference interpreters was attempted. The EBU/OTS report on Eurikon commented,

The results, of course, were well below broadcast standards and the vast majority of viewers found it difficult to cope with the overlaying of the original language with the interpreter’s voice ²⁴

²⁴ EBU/OTS, *Eurikon DBS Pan European Broadcasting*, p. 18

Moreover,

In the News programme this [i.e. interpreters’ difficulties in understanding original sound tracks] lead to unacceptable errors, which, had the service been transmitting to a real audience across Europe, would have led Eurikon into political and legal trouble ²⁵

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19

A senior official of the Council of Europe who had actively participated in the Eurikon experiment commented in an interview with the author on ‘the totally idiotic results of dubbing Shakespeare by an Italian woman’.

The uncomfortable lessons of the first two weeks led ORF, the broadcaster responsible for the third week, to introduce all programmes by two presenters; a male German native speaker and a female English native speaker. For viewers who understood either German or English, programmes were made more accessible (though presentation took up a lot of transmission time during the ORF week), but viewers who did not understand either of these languages were still dependent on simultaneous interpretation over an additional sound track. But in this case the simultaneous interpretation was given twice; once from English and once from German! Programmes were transmitted in the language in which they were made and a voice-over sound track (transmitted on a separate channel) selected according to the language of the target audience. More successfully ORF transmitted teletext overlay titles which could be accessed in either English or Italian (the assumption was that Dutch viewers would be sufficiently polyglot to understand either English, German or Italian).

NOS, for the fourth week, principally relied on *translation* rather

than interpretation. Translators had access to prerecorded programmes (two-thirds of the schedule) before transmission and prepared subtitles and/or a full voice over translation. However, only one set of subtitles was able to be transmitted at one time (the language used for these changed from day to day) and thus other languages were presented with voice over translation. Though these methods were far from the standards of dubbing they were considerably more successful than the simultaneous interpretation used in weeks one and two. 'Professional voices from various broadcasting organizations and freelance professional voices were used. Male parts were read by a male voice, female parts by women. The result was recorded on 24-track audio tape which was synchronized to the video picture'.²⁶ However the improved standards of translation and voicing achieved by NOS resulted in a loss of topicality and immediacy in news programmes. Items could not immediately be inserted into programmes (for example the IBA in its first week of programming had included live coverage of the Pope's UK visit and recently breaking material from the South Atlantic war) and 'what the programme gained in translation it lost in topicality'.²⁷ The ARD followed a similar system in its week (the final week) of transmissions.

Among the conclusions drawn from Eurikon's experiments with different methods of providing linguistic content to viewers in different language communities was the judgement 'the original sound of a programme should be respected as much as possible'.²⁸ This suggests that audio-visual material used in multilingual programming should when possible have natural language on a separate sound track to that carrying the natural background sounds of the situations shown; that 'pre-production of translation work is essential for all but news and current affairs programmes'²⁹, and that subtitling by teletext 'meets the technical requirements of satellite transmission'.³⁰

Eurikon programme content

A quantitative analysis of Eurikon programme content shows that the balance of the programme schedule differed significantly from week to week of Eurikon's transmissions. Although News and Information programming consistently made up the most important programme category (in terms of time allocated to these programme types) in each week there were striking differences in the importance given to news (and other) programming by different Eurikon partners.

The locations shown in Eurikon news programmes, which could be interpreted as the symbolic construction of Eurikon's world, also differed from broadcaster to broadcaster and week to week. Both

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 20

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 21

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Minutes of Eurikon transmission time by broadcaster and programme type.

	NOS	ORF	RAI	ARD	IBA
News	397	376	556	698	395
Documentary	455	244	216	360	372
Drama	86	188	260	20	287
Arts	77	292	270	147	172
Sport	82	58	150	147	105
Light entertainment	194	192	320	154	407
Children	138	185	176	90	82
Feature film	90	221	110	97	112
Religion				15	60
Continuity		221	2	20	24

ARD and NOS bulletins display an attempt to construct news coverage on a cross-national, European, basis rather than on a country-specific basis. Thus the Netherlands broadcaster NOS reported on an Amnesty judgement on international human rights, on progress towards introducing lead free petrol in European locations, and on inflation as a European phenomenon. The German broadcaster made analogous attempts, covering matters such as chauvinism in different European countries, asbestos hazards, and transnational institutions such as NATO and GATT.

Costs

The cost of Eurikon is difficult to estimate with any degree of accuracy. Eurikon estimated a cost of £500,000 for technical and programme costs. However no rights fees were paid for programming (since the programmes were not broadcast) and use of the Eurovision permanent circuits did not incur charges. Moreover staff and equipment costs of the five contributing partners were not included. These were obviously substantial: the EBU/OTS report refers to ‘many hundreds of people’³¹ who contributed to the project (and Papathanassopoulos refers to ‘over 1,000 people’ being employed by Eurikon³²). The report also acknowledges the loan of equipment by RAI (decoders), TDF (scrambling equipment), the EBU centre (network coordination) and the IBA (mobile uplink). The Eurikon experiment was likened by Michael Johnson of the BBC to test driving a Rolls Royce.³³ Anyone can test drive a Rolls Royce but having done so is no guide to the ability of the driver to sustain the costs of ownership and operation of the car. Thus the Eurikon experiment provided no basis on which the long term economic feasibility of a public sector European satellite television channel could be assessed. Indeed the closure of Europa by NOS on the grounds that participating broadcasters had not met their share of the bills suggests that Johnson’s analogy was apposite.

31 Ibid. p. 1

32 S. Papathanassopoulos, *Towards European television: the European Economic Community’s television policy*, MA thesis, City University, London (1986).

33 In an internal BBC memo of October 1981 copied to Neville Clarke with accompanying letter of 20 October 1981.

Conclusion

The success or failure of satellite television whether commercial or public, whether funded by advertising, tax or subscription depends finally on the accessibility and attractiveness of its programming to final consumers. To be sure there are important (and sometimes decisive) intervening variables, such as the paucity of transnational brands (leading to poor prospects for advertising financed international services), or the extent of cable networks on which viewers largely depended for their access to low power satellite television signals (such as Eurikon/Europa). But the relative attractiveness, in terms of costs incurred and benefits accrued, of competing programme services has proven the decisive determinant of the fate of different television services. A variety of factors determine the relative attractiveness of television programme services and schedules. Notably the degree to which programmes and schedules match the 'habitus'³⁴ of audiences (here the factors of language and culture are most important) and the relative cost/benefit trade-offs between competing services. In terms of cost/benefit relationships the relative costs of different delivery systems are particularly important (the cost advantages are overwhelmingly with terrestrial broadcasting) as are the revenues per programme hour which accrued to rival services (here the advantages are with services which draw revenues from large markets with few competing services).

The lack of success of Eurikon/Europa (and the similar lack of success of commercial transnational services such as Sky Channel and Super Channel) suggests that the 'double determinist' assumptions which underpinned European Community policy in the early and mid 1980s were not robust. The new technology of the television satellite was not as powerful as had been anticipated. Neither public nor private sector services were able to create a transnational European audience. However, whilst lack of success was a common experience to public and private services it is striking how far Eurikon's programming emphasized the 'inform' and 'educate' elements of the public service broadcasting vocation and how little the 'entertain'. Here Eurikon/Europa reflected a central emphasis in European public broadcasting, the emphasis on assisting the viewer's and listener's involuntary ascent of the cultural pyramid (the metaphor comes from the Director General of the BBC Sir William Haley's celebrated lecture of 1948).³⁵ Analysis of the programme content of Eurikon reveals how unusually large was the emphasis on drama and light entertainment in the British week relative to that in the weeks contributed by other Eurikon partners. Audience research revealed how little viewers liked this aspect of Eurikon.

³⁴ Bourdieu's term is glossed by Nice: experience internalised in the course of a biological history is the basis of the 'sense' of reality, of honour of linguistic correctness etc. a sense which in turn orientates that subject's practice (Richard Nice: Bourdieu, *Screen Education*, no. 28 [1978])

³⁵ Excerpted in A. Smith, *British Broadcasting*, (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1974)

Eurikon 1982 is considered relatively serious, informative, nonviolent and humourless – and (therefore) just moderately interesting to watch. Viewers have a definite wish for a larger share of light entertainment (such as touristic items) and especially for entertainment.³⁶

Important lessons for contemporary television can be drawn from an analysis of the historical experience of Eurikon. Not the least important of which is that not only are the symbolic universes of European public service broadcasters strikingly different but so too are those of European television viewers. Europe, to misquote Metternich, seems to be a geographical expression rather than a cultural and televisual community.

This article is based on a paper presented to the Fourth International Television Studies Conference 1991. Many thanks to Stylianos Papathanassopoulos (who permitted me to read his MA thesis on European television) to Neville Clarke for telling me so much about Eurikon, to Pam Logan and her colleagues at the British Film Institute who made possible my viewings of Eurikon programming and to the Economic and Social Research Council who funded the research on which this article is based under research grant R 00023 2159.

Film studies in Canada

Despite declines in university funding and the continued underdevelopment of graduate programmes, film studies in Canada in 1992 was marked by a sense of bustling activity. On 30 October, many of those central to the development of the discipline here assembled at the National Press Club in Ottawa to honour Peter Harcourt. Three of Peter's colleagues had produced a *Festschrift*, a volume entitled *Responses: in honour of Peter Harcourt*, and this event served to launch it. The volume commemorated two milestones: Peter's own recent sixtieth birthday, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of his return from England to set up the first Film Studies Department in Canada, at Queen's University in Kingston.

Organizationally, and despite warm relations between the two communities, the film studies community in Canada is divided along linguistic lines. The Film Studies Association of Canada is officially bilingual, but attracts a predominantly Anglophone (and almost exclusively academic) constituency to its annual conferences. The Association Québécoise des études cinématographiques is, as the name suggests, Francophone and Quebec-based, and it is more likely to bring together scholars, archivists and people working in the film industries.

For many years, the Film Studies Association of Canada held its conferences apart from those of the Learned Societies, the umbrella group under whose auspices most Canadian academic societies meet concurrently. This had certain advantages – FSAC could choose a host university with a film studies department and projection facilities – but led to a certain sense of isolation from the main currents of Canadian academic life. Two years ago, on an

experimental basis, the FSAC joined the Learned Societies, and one effect has been a growth in the number of panels cosponsored with other bodies, such as the Canadian Communications Association.

In 1992, the FSAC met in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in the first week of May. This year's conference was devoted to questions of national identity. The recent prominence of this theme within cultural studies internationally has served to revitalize it within Canadian film studies, where it has been a longstanding and sometimes wearying preoccupation. Christine Ramsay, winner of a newly-instituted prize for student work, offered a provocative and convincing rereading of one of the canonical works of Canadian cinema, *Goin' Down The Road* (Donald Shebib, 1970). In urging us to see the film as an exploration of masculine identity and geographical disadvantage rather than as one more literalization of the Canadian 'loser' archetype, Ramsay pointed the way to a reconciliation between tendencies in Canadian film studies which have often developed in isolation.

There are more film-related magazines and journals in Canada at present than ever before. In 1990, the FSAC initiated publication of a *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, partly to offer a refereed venue for those wishing to publish articles on Canadian film. After three issues, the *Journal* is moving to broaden its scope to embrace cultural studies work more generally, filling an often observed absence in Canadian academic life. *Cinéaction*, based in Toronto, continues as the most lively of English-Canadian film magazines, in the face of ongoing financial problems. The strength of *Cinéaction*, I have long felt, lies in its editorial and ideological coherence, even if the substance of this coherence shifts noticeably from one issue to another. Half of its issues – those edited by Kass Banning or Janine Marchessault – draw on the magazine's national context and pay

particular attention to oppositional or marginal film practices. The others, often edited by Robin Wood or Andrew Britton, continue the ongoing reevaluation of mainstream cinemas.

In the early 1970s, *Take One* was a Canadian film magazine with an international audience, emblematic of a period (the Hawks and Godard years) when an auteurist rereading of US cinema went hand in hand with the chronicling of a European avant garde. After being defunct for more than a decade, *Take One* has just been revived by a new group of writers and editors based in Toronto. Judging from the first issue, the new *Take One* will focus more single-mindedly on Canadian independent filmmaking than in its earlier incarnation.

In Quebec, there has been a much longer tradition of glossy, newsstand film magazines, surviving (like much of Quebec's lively artistic press) on a combination of subsidies and advertisements. The most impressive of these are *24 Images* and *Séquences*, whose production values and ability to direct writing of high conceptual substance at a nonacademic audience make them comparable to *Cahiers du cinéma* or *Positif Cinémas*, published at the Université de Montréal, is more academic in tone. The themes of its issues so far – one was on new technologies, another on scripts – suggest the major difference between academic film studies in the English and French-speaking worlds. While the former has been dominated by a politics of identity and representation, French-language film scholarship is both more eclectic and more likely to be concerned with the formal conditions of artistic creation.

The central problem of film studies in English Canada remains the limited opportunities to pursue postgraduate work within the discipline in Canada. York University in Toronto now offers an MFA in film studies, and other universities have programmes at various stages of the approval

process, but growing numbers of students emerge from their undergraduate programmes with little sense of what might follow. For many years, the choice has been between going outside the country (to the USA or Great Britain) or remaining within Canada and pursuing a shadow degree in fields like communications or theatre arts. In either case, these people are very often lost to the country or to the discipline, remaining outside the country or drifting away from Film Studies itself. I hope that the opportunities for people to stay within both will increase considerably over the next decade.

Will Straw

To the Editors

I wish to take issue with Lisa Cartwright's report on the Society for Animation Studies Conference, October 1991 in *Screen* (vol. 33, no. 2 [1992]). As a participant at the Conference I note several errors of fact and interpretation in her comments and some unnecessary insinuations, but I'm more concerned here with the broader argument about the Society of Animation Studies. For example, Cartwright's criticism that many of the broad range of disciplines represented at the Conference were 'remarkably untouched by current issues and methods in film and cultural studies' suggests the orthodoxy of her own academic background. One could just as easily argue that Cartwright's methodology is remarkably untouched by current issues and methods *outside* the politics of critical practice in media and cultural studies.

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Cartwright takes the Society to task for its lack of attention to race and gender, observing that no call was made for papers

on these topics. In fact, the call for papers for the Rochester conference specifically requested papers dealing with multiculturalism, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Telescoping her criticism of individual papers into a criticism of the SAS as a whole, Cartwright describes the Society as 'the promotional organ of industry practices' and calls on 'its governing body to . . . reconsider its own institutional structure, standards and policies'. Cartwright obviously has no knowledge of the soulsearching and self-examination that routinely go on in the meetings of the Steering Committee, in the Annual General Meeting that was held at the Rochester conference, and in the pages of the *Newsletter*. No mention is made of the Society's activities in the promotion of a diverse range of enquiry into animation. The *Newsletter* frequently publishes bibliographies of international animation publications, dissertation abstracts, methodological debates, book reviews and film notes on a

variety of topics that could hardly be described as the promotion of industry practices. Financial support is given to students and overseas scholars. Means of outreach to disenfranchised interests were actively discussed at the Annual General Meeting. Animation is a relatively new area of academic enquiry. The society has only been in existence for five years and is attempting to deal with issues occupying disciplines that have been in existence for far longer. Many of the issues that Cartwright claims are 'ghettoized' or neglected are, in fact, central topics of ongoing public discussion in SAS meetings and publications. If Cartwright's criticisms of the Society had been confined to the Rochester Conference, I would be less disturbed. Broad characterizations about the society, though, should be based on the full range of the society's activities.

Mark Langer

reviews

review article:

Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*. New York and London, Routledge, 326pp.

Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991, 312pp.

Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991, 340pp.

GILLIAN SWANSON

The two collections here, *Stardom* and *Femmes Fatales*, mark a trajectory in film theory which looks beyond dichotomies that offer a given category of 'women' a unitary place in relation to representation to argue for a shift from a singular understanding of its mechanisms towards a model of the diverse, historically situated, and tactical engagements we form with the 'everydayness' of practices of representation.

In the dialogue she instigates between her recent and new material and her earlier essays, Mary Ann Doane develops a concept of 'femmes fatales' composed across a ten-year span. Her central project, the use of psychoanalysis for theorizing – and historicizing – sexual difference and its psychical and representational practices, is put forward as a question about knowledge and its limits, a question posed in the domain of the visible. The congruence of knowledges surrounding sexual difference and its pathologized others in the second half of the nineteenth century, their locus in a moment that saw the development of urban cultures and its technologies, of which cinema is one; and the theorization of the sexual in the originary moment of psychoanalysis

all these provided in that period a distinct way of thinking the relation of the feminine to modernity as it is embodied in the figure of the femme fatale. Doane's interest is in the legacy of historical regimes of sexuality, representation and the body, and in the conditions of legibility for knowledges and definitions of the feminine. For the power of the femme fatale, she says, 'is a function of fears linked to the notions of uncontrollable drives, the fading of subjectivity, and the loss of conscious agency – all themes of the emergent theories of psychoanalysis' (*Femmes Fatales*, p. 2). So the femme fatale functions as a motif of the inscription of male fears of woman, of the female body, of feminism; and also as a sign of the epistemological disturbances that the recognition of female subjectivity brings. While acknowledging that in this way the notion of 'woman' can function as an abstraction and mask differences of historical context and cultural specificity, Doane also recognises the force of such abstractions: 'Our abstractions are our realities. We live them every day.' (p. 10). The tension between the abstraction and the particular is the context for the essays in this book – the analysis of the historical situatedness of the categories and the figures of 'woman' in specific contexts, and their impact on the limits and instabilities of knowledge, sexuality and vision.

Doane's recent writing links two broad interests: the historicity of relations between women and cinema, and an extension of her previous argument that desire is a disorganizing force in the field of perception. In 'Remembering women', she challenges theoretical models of cinema which posit woman as a product of the apparatus, bearing the traces neither of its historical grounding and cultural production nor of its capacity for evidencing the disorganizing slippages as desire and subjectivity are produced in relations of alterity. These 'remembrances' are the basis of Doane's proposal for a history that is inscribed by subjective presence. While this demonstrates 'that the psyche is constructed in, through, and as a history' (p. 88), she is also concerned with the work of history itself – psychoanalytic, filmic: 'an institutionalized memory of what would otherwise remain an incomprehensible particularity' (p. 89).

It is in this respect that Doane argues that feminist theory may avoid reproducing woman as an abstraction; by exploring instead the figure of woman as an unstable element in specific fields of knowledge and their reliance on visibility and spatial relations. This is most obvious in her final essay 'Sublimation and the psychoanalysis of the aesthetic'. The concept of the sublime *substitutes* objects and aims for the sexual itself, posing the possibility of a realm of the nonsexual, a realm of cultural achievement as a way of mastering the sexual. Doane shows how the concept of the sublime is developed in response to a crisis surrounding the sexual object, a crisis which takes two forms: a recognition of 'sexuality gone awry', and a difficulty over the

1 Patrice Petro, 'Modernity and mass culture in Weimar: contours of a discourse on sexuality in early theories of perception and representation', *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987), pp. 115–46

2 *Ibid.* p. 120

3 *Ibid.* p. 116

4 Christine Buci-Glucksmann cited in *Femmes Fatales*, p. 261

opposition between sex and work that can be resolved only by allowing the one to triumph over the other. As Patrice Petro shows of Weimar Germany¹, an ambivalent attention to the overpowering presence of the technologies of urban life, mass consumption and commodified entertainments – including cinema – restructures perceptual and experiential contexts and ‘reorganizes spectators’ relations to space, vision and structures of desire’.² This in turn generates anxieties over the loss of an ‘authentic’ and authoritative contemplative relation to space and objects, giving rise to a proliferation of discourses linking modernity, urban life, mass production and woman, discourses which coalesce in the figure of the prostitute, who represents the modern city in a devouring and demonic image of ‘seduction and cruelty’.³

For Doane, the prostitute offers the figure of a collapse between the boundaries of sex and work, private and public; and also of a woman awry. The prostitute therefore represents a regression that exactly reverses the concept of sublimation: ‘a disfigurement of the “sublime body”’⁴ which from the late nineteenth century becomes an exemplar of the fascinations and dangers of modern forms of urban life. Petro argues that the New Woman’s increased demands for urban presence, by disrupting the forms of separation between public and private that secured masculinity and femininity, precipitated a crisis in masculine cultural authority and knowledge. But she acknowledges that there is a difference between ‘woman’ constructed in these correspondences and the women who claimed the new relation to public space that urban life could offer. Such discourses nevertheless provide the historical conditions for a different imaginary – and everyday – relation to modern life and its entertainments, a terrain for the negotiation of transformed subjectivities. These, Petro suggests, are connected with women’s different investments in the concept and practice of aesthetic detachment and rationality, investments themselves implicated in a distancing of the threat of a too present and too visible corpus of women in the city.

Doane also sees in the concept of the sublime a response to a modern relation of the woman and the city which presented

the potential of an intolerable and dangerous sexuality, a sexuality which is out of bounds precisely as a result of the woman’s revised relation to space, her new ability to ‘wander’ (and hence to ‘err’)

. . . The prostitute ostentatiously exhibited the commodification of the human body, the point where the body and exchange value coincided . . . the new status of the body as exchangeable and profitable image. (p. 263)

The particular potency of this female image, as Petro’s argument might hint, lies in its connection with the economy’s situating the *male* body as object of exchange (and, thereby, potentially, of

waste). As Doane suggests, if bodily property becomes commodified in work, it can be removed from its owner – hence the instabilities that cluster around the figuring of the sexual body. But this is not a concern articulated solely in the image of the prostitute. If concerns over the irregularities of male bodies centring on their susceptibility to the ‘strains’ of business life (or modernity’s ‘shocks’⁵) were allied to the addictions of masturbation – whose potential to induce neurasthenic disorders led to treatment by rest cures (to be taken, significantly, in the country)⁶ – we might see attention to the prostitute as allied to that accorded the masturbator in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For it shows, through an inadequate mastery of the body evident in the failure of continence, an inadequacy of social being for masculinity.

In the wake of a reduction of interest in the prostitute herself in twentieth-century representations, Doane looks to cinema’s proliferation of characters as a relay for the prostitute’s signification of the ‘humanization’ of the commodity. However, we might look instead in two other directions: first at the refiguration and reworking of this complex of meanings in the proliferation of public femininities as they come into visibility at specific cultural moments (matchgirl, flapper, shopper, *grisette*, goodtime girl, model, socialite), and second, at the attention to the male homosexual whose body becomes the ultimate signifier of a pathologized relation between sexual and social definitions which threaten effective citizenship and which, one could argue, ‘take over’ the meanings of the prostitute.⁷ This is, perhaps, the point of a concentration on ‘the feminine’ (with all its dangers of abstraction) as it is invoked across a range of characters, images, figures and ultimately of sexual bodies. If we constantly invest ‘woman’ with the meanings of instability only as it becomes solidified around female characters and figures, we lose out on seeing the feminine as a principle of disruption in representations of male characters, male bodies. (This is an important element in Miriam Hansen’s treatment of Rudolph Valentino’s feminized image in her contribution to *Stardom*.)

Another feature of Mary Ann Doane’s recent work is the positioning of the feminine within other matrices of difference. In ‘Dark continents: epistemologies of racial and sexual difference in psychoanalysis and the cinema’, she shows how the conception of female sexuality as a ‘dark continent’ carries the ‘trace’ of Freud’s connection with nineteenth-century colonial discourse and its imaginings of a knowing and knowable self in the opposition between civilization and its unknowable others (the savage, the primitive, the ‘lower’ races). She demonstrates that conceptions of female sexuality can be seen to carry the trace of ‘the ethnicity of the white Western psyche’ (p. 211), the repression of which becomes

the prerequisite for the construction of a white culture which

5 Walter Benjamin ‘On some motifs in Baudelaire’, in *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 157–202.

6 Rob McQueen, ‘Mortified and punished: the businessman and his body in nineteenth-century England’, paper presented at the Tenth Annual Law in History Conference, Melbourne, 1991.

7 Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Comedia/Routledge, 1987).

stipulates that female sexuality act as the trace within of what has been excluded. (p 211)

Doane uses this category and its inscription of racial and sexual difference to interrogate the historical constitution of psychoanalytic knowledges and the limits of their vision:

For otherness, whether sexual or racial, is usually articulated as a problem of the limits of knowledge and hence of visibility, recognition, differentiation (p 212)

In colonial discourses, an equivalence between the way (some) white women are situated and the invocation of a notion of 'primitive' races leads to a pathologizing of female sexuality around the signs of the body of the black woman. These signs are deployed in diversifying the 'feminine' around responsibility and refinement, or vulgarity and danger (as in the instance of the prostitute, who comes to be signified by a diseased, open ['blackened'] body haunting the dark recesses of the nineteenth-century city⁸). In fact, the term 'dark continent' moved from anthropology into more general discourse from the mid nineteenth century onwards. This writing suggested that concentrating missionary work in Africa ignored the 'dark continent' at home, as Britain's cities became populated by the unstable and uncivilized dangerous classes: the 'heathens', 'savages', 'barbarians', 'denizens' or 'wandering tribes' of the 'unknown country' of Britain's inner cities referred to by Mayhew, Chadwick, Charles Booth, and other contemporary commentators.⁹ Just as the prostitute figured as 'sewer', discharging the wastes of masculine disorder¹⁰, so the proletariat was associated with the 'fetid effluvia' and miasma emanating from the insanitary waste which characterized their regions of the city. Both became identified with that 'vast dunghoop of ignorance and vice the social pestilence'¹¹ which threatened to corrupt health and pollute civilization in Britain's metropolitan centres. This imbues the term 'dark continent' with a very particular notion of the feminine, associating it with the unruly 'mob' of the working class as an intimate and immediate threat to social stability.¹²

If Mary Ann Doane shows in *Femmes Fatales* how the validated femininity of the white woman still constitutes a vulnerable underpinning of civilized sexuality, 'the signification of the always too tenuous hold of civilization' (p. 214), Nancy Armstrong elsewhere postulates connections between mid nineteenth-century scientific and fictional attempts to pathologize otherness according to secure physiognomies. This leads Armstrong to consider alternative scenarios of displaced masculinity in the colonial encounter; in the unstable relations of colonial knowledge enacted around the bodies of men together, and in the insecure grasp of autonomous and authoritative masculinity in the spectre of their contact with the

8 Nancy Armstrong *The occidental Alice: differences*, vol 2 no 2 (1990) pp 3-40

9 Louis Chevalier *The Labouring Classes and Dangerous Classes* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973); Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp 312-70

10 Alain Corbin 'Commercial sexuality in nineteenth-century France: a system of images and regulations' in Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (eds) *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) p 211

11 Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* p 329

12 Cora Kaplan 'Wild nights: pleasure/sexuality/feminism in *Sea Changes*' (London: Routledge, 1986), p 44

¹³ Armstrong, 'The occidental Alice'

¹⁴ Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Cambridge: Polity Press and Basil Blackwell 1989)

bodies of 'native' women in novels such as *King Solomon's Mines*.¹³

While male bodies are situated within the body politic as the realm of civilization, it can be argued that woman as *signifier* of civilization can only *represent* it at one remove, being constituted as sign of civilization only in her exclusion from the body politic.¹⁴ While this relation becomes constitutive of a particular spatiality (of the city, of the colonial landscape), its correlate is that the final reference point of woman is nature, the body, the primitive and uncivilized, the limit point of knowledges. Hence woman exposes civilization, subjectivity, sexuality not as achievement, but merely as process – fragile, tenuous, incomplete, unstable. The particular landscapes of sexual knowledges which strain to produce abstractions actually speak of the impossibility of constructing an enduring sign of absolute difference.

While Nancy Armstrong analyses a specific textual presence within colonial relations and definitions, using the novel as a document of the inscription of knowledges in its own historical moment, Doane's case studies in *Femmes Fatales* have a looser connection with the colonial enterprise within which psychoanalytic categories emerged. Looking to *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper, 1933) as a travel narrative or adventure film of the thirties to chart 'Hollywood's colonialist project' (p. 214), or to *Blonde Venus* (Josef von Sternberg, 1932) as a maternal melodrama that shows the pivotal position of white women in a 'racist' economy, does not allow Doane to address the emergence and proliferation of forms and networks of knowledge – anthropological, medical, eugenic – which allowed 'race' to become an operational category. In an analysis of Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) Doane proposes that we see the 'reverberations' of the metaphor of the dark continent in the lack of knowledge and visibility accorded to black female sexuality; and she suggests that the film might therefore be seen as a mapping of the white imagination of blackness. But this analysis does not extend to the precise articulations that sustain the category of black female sexuality in 1950s USA. Doane shows how this category disturbs the visual field according to the melodramatic instability of relations between character and decor, background and foreground. However, she does not address the logic and specificity of this cultural repertoire in the same way as is suggested in her precise and suggestive connection of the concept of female sexuality to its generative field, or as implied in Armstrong's examination of the figure of the black woman in colonial discourse.

There is a difficulty in the way 'race' has figured in feminist theory as a term whose use as a monolithic reference – an autonomous and connected grid of difference without historical grounding – may reduce each cultural moment and set of practices to a similarity whose logic a more finite and localized focus would not sustain. This is evident in Jackie Byars's study of the 1950s

melodrama, *All That Hollywood Allows*. Here race, along with gender, becomes dehistoricized in an ideological notion of power as hierarchy rather than a historically and culturally specific set of dynamics. Such a framework finds 'inequality' wherever it finds signs of racial (and sexual) difference and erases the constitution in knowledges of differences as they are actually lived. This may be taking too literally Teresa de Lauretis's claim that we should distinguish between women as historical subjects and woman as the feminine 'non-subject', in a practice 'by which the relations of the subject in social reality can be rearticulated from the historical experience of women' (quoted in *Femmes Fatales*, p. 79). De Lauretis makes it clear this is not the same as finding a privileged female 'tradition', and the reference to 'historical' subjectivity clearly designates a different concept of experience. However, any attempt to privilege 'actual women', within feminist film theory raises the difficulty of marking out the boundaries of what constitutes 'actual' and 'experience'. How can we 'know' actual women without recourse to a transparent realm of experience and individuality, to an 'ontological fullness'? How do 'actual women' cultivate themselves *as* 'actual women', historically? With the imputation of a unitary, given, consciousness we overlook the dynamics of historical encounter and its neurotic struggle. For as Doane states in her discussion of Frantz Fanon:

Race relations are ensconced within the imaginary. To the extent, however, that there *are* material and economic effects of racism, race does exist as a category of both political and psychical significance. But its meaning would be socially variable rather than biologically essential (p. 218)

It is characteristic of the discussion of race that its politicization has to be argued on the basis of 'racism' (would we suggest that material and economic effects of sexism are the only route to 'politicizing' sexual difference?); and that there is an assumption that the relation between the social and the psychical cannot be taken as in itself generative of a political matrix. As Doane argues, abstractions, through their pervasiveness in the imaginary, are 'lived' in their everydayness. This can be as true for racial difference as it is for sexual difference. The precise connections and instabilities within the field of meaning and subjectivity that are generated by racial difference are equally dependent on the instance and its articulation in historical terms. The historical deployment of such categories – and the knowledges and institutional arrangements which sustain their legibility – show us where we might look for the way definitions take on their everydayness.

The idea of woman as a problematic category, whose difficulties and disruptions are a feature of the historical work of representation and the transformation of categories in their cultural particularity, is

a distinctive feature of Mary Ann Doane's recent writing. This problematic feminine, however, runs through all of her work, in which the interrogation of woman is always constituted as a problem of knowledge and its irreducibility to the terms of vision and visibility. The key film genre here, in Doane's view, is melodrama, in which the instabilities of the social are mapped onto the sexual, in narratives of recognition and misrecognition. The instability of relations of character and decor in film melodramas presents a questioning of the relations between ontology and epistemology, between the real and the pretence, so that knowing, looking and being become disarticulated in the struggle to formulate categories around which the imperatives of sexual definition may cohere.

There is apparently no such instability in the melodramas discussed by Byars in *All That Hollywood Allows*. Despite its constant references to 'struggle', this study presents an equation between the 'needs' of American Ideology (capitals in the original) and the industry's output and textual mechanisms. The book's opening words – 'Constantly barraged' – indicate something of the proposed coherence and stasis of a systematic deployment of representation, subjectivity and meaning, in which engagement can appear only as 'intervention', 'as a challenge to the patriarchal institutions that oppress us all' (*All That Hollywood Allows*, p. 3). This notion of oppression, however, is one to hold on to, for Byars is actually not much interested in patriarchal institutions. Their particular and uneven forms of organization; their establishment of ordered, disciplined and authoritative principles of social organization and regulation, their process of definition and their organization of knowledge; or their marking out of positions we can occupy in order to participate in culture as an arena of social interaction.

Oppression, suggesting as it does a collusive, all-powerful, undifferentiated and ridiculously coherent expression of the relation of culture to women, is a bothersome term. While it might offer many opportunities for heroic declarations and revolutionary fervour, it collapses different dimensions of feminine definition into a warm mass of resistance; while struggle comes to encompass a feminist heroics centred by a moral purpose which exists prior to any analysis, theory, or political instance. Byars's discussion is informed by a rhetoric that cultivates the character of the 'correct' (this word and its antinomy appears frequently) feminist and her political scenarios (p. 3). In critical terms, this leads to an engagement with the body of Hollywood melodrama in the 1950s centring on an account of the sorts of characters that appear in the films, what they want and do, and how it all turns out. A book which, like this one, provides a lengthy summary of theories and positions for each chapter before going on to select examples needs to take account of the particular mechanisms operating in any

example of cultural representation as a practice. And if criticism is to be centred upon the 'doings' of characters, it might do well to adopt, with Mary Ann Doane, John Frow's formulation for transcending the dichotomy of character as 'analogue of the person' versus textual mark, by considering 'readability and the affective engagement of reader or spectator with the text'. This suggests we should link an attention to the work of representation with its readability, in this case looking at the knowledges that allow the concept of character to become legible; those 'cultural schemata defining the nature of the self' (*Femmes Fatales*, pp. 251–2).

For this, a view of history that is more than a backdrop to the 'needs' of American Ideology is required:

the social fabric of America had begun to weaken. The interconnected social institutions composing its warp and woof had never before been called into question as they were in the 1950s. . . [P]reviously sacrosanct gender roles began to alter, and struggles over the meaning of *female* and *male* became particularly evident in the cultural atmosphere (*All That Hollywood Allows*, p. 8, emphasis mine)

Melodrama, 'born in a period of crisis', is used here to 'provide evidence' of these concerns over gender. The lack of specificity offers a view of culture as a pre-given accomplishment within which texts simply appear, without an explanation in the cultural imperatives that make sense of them. Similarly, ideology and subjectivity are presented as curiously complete categories:

after the war, the ideology of domesticity entranced the middle class, who provided normative values, shaping the dominant political institutions that affected all Americans. (p. 80)

This resolved completeness is an effect of removing specific knowledges from their historical placing.

Theoretical models also suffer here from their presentation in the context of an evaluative schema that counters the bad with the good, a strategy which substantially affects the selection and the summaries of those models considered. As a result, Byars makes the curious claim that 'of those feminist critics who still focus on Hollywood film, most have remained fixated on women's victimization' (p. 19), and thus omits mention of the swathe of theorists and critics who have looked at Hollywood cinema as a site of female pleasure, and of others whose examination of processes of reading and spectatorship substantially problematizes women's engagement with definitions of femininity. Byars's model, taking up Nancy Chodorow's theories of intersubjective relations, addresses the neglect of object relations psychoanalysis in feminist film theory (though Jessica Benjamin's article on intersubjectivity suggests another way of interrogating this oversight¹⁵). However, the textual

¹⁵ Jessica Benjamin, 'A desire of one's own: psychoanalytic feminism and intersubjective space', in Teresa de Lauretis (ed.), *Feminist Studies: Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 78–101.

readings in *All That Hollywood Allows* fail fully to respond to the task of disruption that the book promises, largely because Chodorow's theory of subjectivity is not concerned with processes of fragmentation. The question of how institutionally organized knowledges and practices of representation offer a readability which allows melodrama to become a recognizable genre is also ducked.

A cluster of essays in *Stardom: Industry of Desire* asks just that question. In 'A Star is Born and the construction of authenticity', Richard Dyer outlines the emergence of the category of the individual and its connection with concepts of authenticity and truth that propose it as guarantor of social coherence, and shows how this provides conditions for star performance to be developed and for stars to be read. Christine Gledhill, in 'Signs of melodrama', also discusses this relation between 'authenticity' and moral personality. She argues that nineteenth-century melodrama drew on newly developing theories of personality to place emotional states and psychic relations as centres of meaning and principle. Performance modes were developed to reflect this and to *embody* ethical procedures, as the moral code of the plays became oriented by a new focus on the concept of the individual as 'personality'. These investments defined the forms of expressivity that the individual could take up – forms developed in codes of gesture, dress, vocal and facial conventions – in narratives organized around the ethical consequences of individual action. Gledhill finds the relations developed between the individual and the social to be indicative of the emergent genre of melodrama as well as of its ongoing forms, its fundamental axis being to make the world 'morally intelligible'. While Barry King, in 'Articulating stardom', examines the particular economy of the body that informs connections between performance and gestural meaning, Gledhill traces the history of a search for authenticity in theories of acting and their relation to melodramatic rhetoric. 'The first promise of the star is that of access to the personality itself' (*Stardom*, p. 226).

The material in this collection is too extensive to represent fully here, but the juxtaposition of earlier pieces and more recent writings make some interesting connections. These are a product of the broad and original research that the book brings forward in both its individual contributions and its editing. For example, Charles Eckert's 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's window' from 1978 complements Charlotte Cornelia Herzog's and Jane Marie Gaines's '“Puffed sleeves before tea-time”: Joan Crawford, Adrian and women audiences', first published in 1985. Both focus on the extrafilmic circulation of star images as popular commodities. 'Puffed sleeves', for example, looks at the dress Joan Crawford wears in her 1932 movie *Letty Lynton* and its circulation at different levels of the fashion and magazine industries, and shows how notions of American style and democratic concepts of 'self-

improvement' and 'social advancement' made possible the expansion of the ready-to-wear fashion industry in the context of the US Depression.

The diversity of the material in *Stardom* is impressive. The collection covers, for example, institutional processes of the construction of star images; screen acting; the 'personality' in British film and television; the incorporation and overlooking of black stars ('For the black woman on the screen her colour has become a kind of blankness which spectators use for their own projections . . . in the images this iconically impotent cinema has offered them.' [p. 54]); the development of female stars in Hindi cinema, sexual and racial ambiguity in Michael Jackson's *Thriller* and its connection with AfroAmerican popular music and the cultivation of 'voice'; the similarities between the 'mannish lesbian' and androgynous star images of the thirties; and lesbian spectators' readings of a discourse of homoeroticism. And Miriam Hansen's essay on women fans and their relation to the masochistic scenarios of Rudolph Valentino's films provides an appropriate link back to *Femmes Fatales*.

Hansen complicates Doane's early, significant, attestation that the female spectator's positioning in relation to the over-presence of woman in the image prevents her from taking up the appropriate distance from which active desire might operate. In the Valentino films, Hansen finds an overlaying of sexually contradictory meanings that offer the pleasures of both transvestism and masquerade. The desiring look at the male body (hero/performer) opens a space for an 'undomesticated gaze' ('a swerving and sliding gaze' [*Stardom*, p. 265]) which is culturally and psychically arranged as a mechanism of female subjectivity. In Valentino's image, invested with 'connotations of sexual ambiguity, social marginality and ethnic/racial otherness' (p. 260), the figure of the male body allows this gaze to be taken up in a structure of reciprocity and ambivalence. The cult of Valentino's body suggests to Hansen a particular reading of female pleasure

the Valentino films articulated the possibility of female desire outside motherhood and family . . . they offered a morality of passion, an ideal of erotic reciprocity . . . [F]ocusing pleasure on a male protagonist of ambiguous and deviant identity, [Valentino] appealed to those who most strongly felt the effects – freedom as well as frustration – of transition and liminality, the precariousness of a social mobility predicated on consumerist ideology. (p. 275)

review:

**Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory*
Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, 210pp.**

DIANNE CHISHOLM

The authors of *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* introduce the textual practices of the later Jacques Derrida to film studies. Their purpose is pedagogical and polemical¹ to instruct the reader about what this later Derrida does¹ and to argue how he can and should be applied to cinema 'beyond' the current predilection for structuralist criticism. According to Brunette and Wills, the arrival of applied grammatology in film studies means the dissolution of cinema 'as we know it' and the advent of 'post-cinema'. Derridean purveyors of film culture read (and write) across and against established categories of production and reception, playfully subverting the law of genre and the charismatic authority of the oeuvre. Their work brings to an end deadended attempts to theorize and fix cinema's 'proper' domain, while opening onto new media technologies. In coming to an end, cinema launches into the 'postal' (poststructural, postauthorial, posthistorical) free of any determining direction, destiny, strategy. Liberated from language systems and structures through new developments in film art, post-cinema also escapes social praxis. Indeed, post-cinema is so thoroughly autonomous, so self-transforming, that any attempt by critics to 'position' its future production would be delusory.

Cinema, as a function of the postal, is thus an element within a host of media apparatuses – some of which are in the process of transformation – that will inevitably transform cinema. However much desire or theoretical argument, including ours, might seek to

1 Brunette and Wills strike a departure from American deconstructionists who have so far chosen to emulate the earlier Derrida, the Derrida of the rigorously close textual analysis that demonstrates the inevitable double binds of logocentrism without attempting to 'rewrite' these double binds in the language of *différance*. By applied grammatology I refer to the authors' pedagogical putting into effect the "other" conceptual and lucid side of language that the sense of *différance* opens up. (pp. 5-6)

foresee a future position for cinema, or for film theory, within those apparatuses, no amount of desire or theory can determine and destine the future of cinema in anything other than the most provisional sense (p. 198)

Brunette and Wills are celebrating, not lamenting, post-cinema's postmodern condition but their rhetoric of lament protects them against charges that deconstruction is apolitical. Having assured us (or, more importantly, themselves) that cinema will be inevitably free-moving, undetermined and nonaligned, they can proceed to sell deconstruction to film studies without encumbering its application with social and political concerns. Such defiance of position is a position nonetheless.

I am concerned to summarize the pedagogical and polemical strengths and weaknesses of this book from the angle of a reviewer who has political stakes in theorizing and advancing certain media practices, particularly those of feminist cinema. I find *Screen/Play* to be instructive on several counts. Above all, it teaches the seasoned and seduced filmgoer a lesson in deconstructive distanciation, enabling 'him' (the language of this book is gender indifferent) to recognize the illusionism of cinematic realism, to 'see' the hegemonic logic of the 'natural' world order which film so artfully reproduces.

But the book also displays several significant shortcomings, some of which might be severe enough to discredit the project as a whole. First, it repeatedly turns the argument for deconstruction into an argument against semiotics and psychoanalysis, thereby polarizing discourses which might otherwise find interactive critical engagement, and undermining deconstruction's general commitment to undoing oppositions. The book's hasty dismissal of feminist semiotics (as a late form of structuralism devoted to a nostalgic pursuit of the transcendental female subject [p. 56]) is a case in point. Little attempt is made by these authors to consider the extensive work of feminist film semioticians such as Teresa de Lauretis and Kaja Silverman – work which radically critiques the artifice of idealism while outlining methods of appropriating and transforming media apparatuses for reconstituting female desire. This last shortcoming calls into question the notion of *applied* grammatology: the authors of *Screen/Play* may eloquently argue for the application of deconstruction's negative critique; but they draw the line at promoting positive change, at theoretical practice which would not just disturb phallogocentrism but shift and/or replace it with feminist re-representations of minority history, experience, subjectivity. This, then, is the third shortcoming of the book – that in celebrating the 'postal-effects' of applied grammatology, in promoting discussion which ever defers and diverts the relay of cinematic message, it effectively *postpones* dialectical *interplay*.

2 See Teresa de Lauretis *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

between cinematic aesthetics and sociocultural praxis. A passionate demarcation of the boundlessness of 'screen/play' severely limits the prospect of 'applying' deconstruction, and precludes or denies the prospect of an intertextual criticism (such as de Lauretis's²) which mixes deconstructive practice with interpretive practice and theories of cultural transformation.

Brunette and Wills read film as *writing* – that is, as a technology of recording with a Derridean shift of emphasis from the reproductive and/or representative function of the illusory image to the productive and mediating function of the material *techné*.

If the image–referent relation were to be conceived in terms of writing, questions of iconicity, which still inform much discourse on film theory, would open onto the wider context of rhetorical relations (p. 75).

3 *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982). *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987). *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

In place of the familiar notions of trace, supplement, *différance*, the authors discuss film technology in destructuring metaphors which punctuate Derrida's later work³ 'pharmakon, tympan, hymen, parergon' (p. 78), 'the umbrella, postcard, and matchbox' (p. 79); and various others such as 'anagram' (pp. 86–94); 'punctum' (pp. 111–14); 'hieroglyph' (pp. 131–4); and 'signature' (pp. 119–24). In using these terms, the authors instruct us to read film as poetic language – as an effect, that is, of figuration, or as the projection of an illusory referent through certain 'rhetorical functions'. Derrida's battery of metaphors enables deconstructive critics to de-compose the film text, its illusory projection, into an infinite play of figure and device. Such radical critique transforms the ontological status of the screen from 'diaphanous window onto the world' to intervening 'membrane' or 'locus of relay and articulation' (p. 79).

Against traditional genre studies, the authors apply Derrida's 'parergon' – the undecidable power of the frame to figure at once both inside and outside the picture. Instead of reading a film or montage within the confines of generic expectations (established by and borrowed from literature), they read it 'inside out' in its reversible capacity to *frame* (displace) as well as to *be framed by* generic boundaries. Against oeuvre studies, and studies centred in idealized notions of the author ('auteurism'), they trace a 'signature effect' – reading for the author's manifest dream text in acoustic and/or visual part-signs – hieroglyphs, phonemes, anagrams drawn (by chance) from the author's name and disseminated throughout the text.

The authors also make extensive use of Derrida's female sexual metaphors, particularly the hymen (pp. 82–6): 'we shall not hesitate to call cinema the deconstruction of the mimetic operation rather than the confirmation of it, and it is in this sense that the screen can be called a hymen' (p. 85). Film's 'hymen/screen/mirror' is 'the unseen of cinematic representation' (p. 85), the 'support of visibility'

(p 85), the double 'site' of union (of image and referent) and rupture (of the illusion of visual integrity). Reading film as hymen also exposes

the marriage or rupture between sound and image, for if the sound track were to take leave of the strict context that is the screen, the plane of representation, then the overwhelming majority of films would reveal characters mouthing words, 'a pure medium, of fiction', not so much charade as pure representationality (p 86)

In applying the grammatology of the hymenal, the authors are keen to deny charges of discursive violence against women:

one might ask whether the hymen, as site of potential, and perhaps structural and institutional, violence performed on real women in the real world, was not being overlooked or obscured in the appropriation of the term for deconstruction. The argument could be made that for a male critic to use the term 'hymen' is to reenact structures of mastery if not violence to woman (p. 95)

To understand deconstruction's use of female sexual metaphor as violence against women would be to (mis)read it as literally anatomical and not figuratively, as catechresis, with exploitable potential for undoing the seams of filmic illusion. Inverting the question, they ask: would it not be an act of violence against the text to reduce its figurative duplicities and ambiguities to the merely referential? Should we not instead be alerted to 'the violence that reduces the hymen to a single sense (that of woman), for it is the violence of a clash or resolution of differences, the very opposition that the hymen in question here deconstructs'? (p 95)

Such a defensive dismissal of the literal hints at the authors' unease with actual violence against women. As if to reinforce their defence, they select for paradigmatic analysis two films whose fame derives from their scandalous representations of violence and women. *The Bride Wore Black* (François Truffaut, 1967) and *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1984) present Brunette and Wills, I suggest, with a supreme opportunity for reading against the grain of 'concerned' interpretation; for irreverently and masterfully displacing the situational and existential violence in which women are filmically inscribed to the background of playful textual surfaces. The words 'black and blue' around which their discussion repeatedly turns, refer equivocally to the emotionally and/or physically bruised and battered women in the film and to the blue-black 'ink' of filmic writing. The writerly black and blue eventually gains ascendancy and discussion proceeds with a summary of applied readings of the hymen/screen, the parergon, border crossings between genres.

(romance, thriller), and signature effects (Lynch-ings and True/Fauxs)

Thematic violence against women is recontextualized and deemphasized (though not entirely erased) in a reading committed to tracing and undoing the law of genre and to employing the structural undecidability of the hymen. Traces of 'black and blue' in Truffaut's film are read as signs, not of the bride's nihilistic and sorrowful suffering, but of the decentring juncture of antithetical genres – film noir (black) and tragic love story (blue, [pp. 143–4]) The approach to Lynch's film is instructively abstract:

A reading of *Blue Velvet* that would concentrate on textual fissures in order to problematise the self-constitution of the text's meaning, and more directly the self-constitution of textual borders, raises the question of the negotiation of difference on which that reading depends and whether it is complicit with the resolution of difference by violence that dominates the film That is to say, does my problematisation of textual borders amount to a reduction of their difference, analogous then to the violence perpetrated against the female as difference in the film? (p 147)

In other words, we are warned against reading Dorothy's rape as *rape* since such a reading is said to perform a sadistic act (of reduction) on the *différence* of writing in the same way that Frank performs sadistic acts on the woman's body in a frenzy to mutilate and destroy her sexual difference. Further deconstructive defensiveness occupies the footnotes:

Though there may be discussion as to whether the violence perpetrated against Dorothy Vallens in the film is necessarily a violence perpetrated against woman as representing difference, any analysis of that question would have to turn on the matter of her rape, on the matter of sexual violence. That in turn would seem to depend on a notion of domination, a form of repression of difference (pp 147–9, n4)

Without denying that [*Blue Velvet* foregrounds violence against (a) woman] it also needs to be argued that the film as text similarly seeks to dominate the readings it generates and that the call for a singular reading is not so much a form of oppositional resistance as an abdication of strategical possibilities, at worst a form of critical masochism (p 149, n5)

In defending the text against the violence of reductive (thematic, hermeneutic, political) readings, the authors perform a critical violence of their own they suppress analyses of symptomatic violence against women in film, which film itself is troubled to expose They also neglect to ask how audiences of women might receive these films and their readings of them How do 'we'

spectating women, who so rarely witness the presentation of active and positive female subjects in any media, but who are so frequently exposed to the objectification and mutilation of the overly-visible female body in all, learn to read against the grain of misogynistic culture? Brunette and Wills may teach us various techniques of reading *différance* in place of reference and identity so that we can disengage and distance ourselves from the text's pull towards identification. But should we be, can we be, less alert to the violence against woman in film than on the street? Should we not continue to read rape as rape – does our survival not depend on it?

The authors of *Screen/Play* deflect questions about the gendered viewing subject for fear of referring to a mystical signified outside the realm of their critical discourse. And they do not hesitate to criticize feminist psychoanalysis and semiotics for launching inquiries in this area. But their deferral might be read as deference to a certain phallocentrism which assumes that all critics, men and women, occupy the same position from which to practice and advance deconstructive readings. Surely 'we-women' are not subject to the violent effects of film, to the displacement and deconstruction of woman in language in the same way that men are. This is not because men and women are essentially different, but because they are differently positioned in history, in society and in their discourses – and more often than not in the place of object or victim in a culture dominated by men. Women's reading strategies that confront, play upon, transform the violent effects of film will necessarily differ from those of men, and, indeed, from those of the authors of *Screen/Play*.